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PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS 1998

The Future for the N.Z. Society of Animal Production

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Genetics is the study of inheritance, and animal breeding is the application of knowledge in genetics to achieve improvement. In the context of animal breeding, a systematic framework (Harris et al., 1984) is typically employed to design improved breeding programmes. The steps involved in this systematic framework include the following.

1. Define the goal of the business.
2. Identify the list of traits that influence the goal.
3. Determine the relative (economic) importance of the traits in the list.
4. Measure those characteristics that allow individuals to be ranked then selected (or culled) in terms of their contribution to progress towards the goal.
5. Make preferential use of superior individuals as parents of the next generation.

In principle, similar steps can be applied to many issues that are encountered outside of the field of animal breeding and genetics. Such an approach has been followed in the deliberations that have led to recommendations for the future of the Society, as moved, amended and voted on at the 1998 Annual General Meeting. This paper documents some of the thinking that took place in the development of the recommendations. Much of this thinking was directed by discussion that took place in a session held at the 1997 Conference – in particular, the problem of answering the straightforward questions as to what we were as a Society, and for whom we were to serve. Later discussions with the Immediate Past President, Dr Steve Davis, were very helpful in clarifying some issues and developing joint motions for the basis of constructive AGM debate. In that sense, this document should be considered a joint effort. However, I must take personal responsibility for many opinions in this document, some of which may not be as widely accepted as I would like to believe.

What is NZSAP ?

The first step in determining our future, or in being able to discriminate between alternative options for the future, requires that we define who we are, and why we exist. It is my view that NZSAP is simply an Association of (Animal) Scientists. It is important that the reader interpret the word “scientists” in its widest context. A scientist is not identified by a list of degrees or by a white coat. A diction-

ary definition of a scientist is “a student of any science” and science is “knowledge based on systematic observations; skill based on study, experience and practice”. Using this definition, all our members may be considered scientists, regardless of whether they record their profession as scientist, veterinarian, extension agent, farmer or student. Our members are not just any scientists, they are scientists that have a particular interest in animals – again with the word “animal” interpreted within the broadest context – therefore including, agronomists, molecular biologists, economists etc provided their interests include animals or systems that involve animals. For the remainder of this paper, my arguments assume the reader accepts that NZSAP is an Association of Animal Scientists.

Why do Members Join and Contribute to NZSAP ?

I believe “scientists” join NZSAP because they believe they will obtain *satisfaction* from membership. Scientists seek:

- Opportunities to communicate their findings, by both oral and written means.
- Opportunities to be enlightened by the findings of other scientists.
- Opportunities to constructively debate and comment on the findings and communications of others.
- Opportunities for informal discussion with colleagues that are outside their geographic region or immediate discipline area, to gain awareness of wider issues.
- Recognition for their outstanding endeavours.
- Financial assistance, particularly in order to leverage their employer or other organisations.
- An Association that adds to, and does not compete with, the activities of their employer organisations.

Scientists gain satisfaction from meeting the above needs.

Members of NZSAP have obtained satisfaction from attending and participating in the Annual Conference, receiving and contributing to the regular newsletter, nominating peers or receiving prestigious and financial awards, writing, publishing or sourcing uniquely New Zealand information from the occasional publication (OP) series. There is no doubt that our members have achieved considerable satisfaction over the years. This is attested by our track record in terms of longevity (approaching 60 years), our membership numbers (static around 500), number of papers offered (growing from 50 to near 100 papers each

year), and accumulated capital (now in excess of \$300,000).

Clearly the goal of NZSAP, as an Association of Animal Scientists, should be to increase the satisfaction of its members.

Getting more satisfaction

Numerous presidents have told us, as a Society, we must make decisions – we are at a crossroads. Many have offered suggestions, including having more farmer members, more science managers at the conference, more political comment, more research dollars, or more collaboration. However, few of their dreams have been realised.

Personally, I don't believe that simply having more members will increase the satisfaction of the existing members of the Society. Nor do I believe more farmer members would improve our satisfaction. We actually have relatively few farmer members and most of those that we do have, would seem to be better scientists according to my original definition than some of us who have made science our career. I believe we tend not to attract science managers to the Conference because they don't currently achieve satisfaction by attending. Some active members rapidly fall from sight in the Society once achieving positions in science management. We will need to ensure they obtain satisfaction if we are to retain and attract them in future.

I believe the aspirations of previous Presidents have not been met for two reasons. First, they have told us their view – they have identified their path for us – but we have not always discussed or agreed with them. Those that disagreed often did not openly do so. Second, the *modus operandi* of the Society has never been changed to ensure that we do move in the direction identified. This is partly a result of the Presidential responsibilities largely terminating with the delivery of the Presidential address. Control is then in the hands of the former Vice-President, who should have ideas of his/her own.

Presidential Reporting

The Annual General Meeting discussed the concept of explicitly stating the responsibilities of the President with regard to meeting the Society objects. Following some discussion, it was moved that an addition to the Constitution be introduced, requiring the *President to report annually* on actions taken by the Management Committee to address *each* of the Society objects. It is not expected that all action to increase member satisfaction is taken by the President – but the President must assume responsibility for ensuring that Management Committee takes action to advance the objects.

Original Objects of NZSAP

The original objectives of the Society were to:

- Provide an organisation to bring about active collaboration of all members in the field of animal production.
- Provide an annual meeting of members at which papers will be read and discussed.
- Take such action as may be deemed necessary to foster improvement in animal production.

The inaugural Presidential address referred to the Society

embracing people from a wide range of disciplines – from soil chemistry, geology, plant research, together with those with interests in animal health, breeding, feeding and management (Ranstead, 1941 cited by Jury, 1990).

There is a feeling among some members that the original objects are a little general and that the Society would benefit from spelling some of them out in more detail. After discussion on this topic at the Annual General Meeting, it was agreed that a constitutional change should be initiated to this end. The new objects, developed with considerable discussion involving a sequence of constructive amendments, as voted and carried at the AGM are shown below.

- To provide an organisation to bring about active collaboration among those involved in the science of producing food, fibre and other products from livestock.
- To provide an annual meeting for members which will encourage both inter- and intra-disciplinary exchange and discussion of findings.
- To assist young people in a manner which develops an interest in the science of food and fibre production.
- To provide visions for the future of animal production in New Zealand.
- To promote the value of science in the development of animal production.
- To take such action as may be deemed necessary to foster improvement in animal production.

Failure to meet objects

There is no doubt that the Society has been very successful according to a number of performance indicators, some of which were described earlier. Nevertheless, there is room for improvement, and only by identifying our shortcomings will we constructively develop a vision for the future and some means to achieve that vision.

It is my opinion that, at least in recent years (post 1980), the Society itself has done little or nothing to bring about active research collaboration in any real sense of the word. There is no doubt that active collaboration has occurred between researchers in different regions and organisations, but this has largely been driven by resource issues, or the enthusiasm of individual researchers, and not the activities of the Society. The Society has directly contributed to collaboration in the preparation and publication of research findings via its successful series of OPs. At most of the Annual Conferences papers have been read followed by questions of clarification but there has been little in depth discussion of results or their implications. The Society has been involved in very few actions to foster improvement in animal production, other than farmer oriented sessions within some annual conferences and the production of OPs. The Society has also done little to expand Ranstead's interpretation of "animal production" beyond the pastoral interpretation. In particular, there are practically no papers on pig or poultry production.

Opportunities to advance

The Society has the opportunity to improve member satisfaction by seeking to achieve collaboration among scientists, enabling two-way discussion of findings, fostering improvement in animal production, and expanding the production process at both ends beyond the typical "pasture to processor" demand chain. But how can these opportunities be harnessed operationally? History shows that these opportunities will not be realised simply through the President recognising and espousing the opportunity. It is not practical to expect the management committee to single-handedly achieve these tasks – most committee members have had particular portfolio responsibilities that already place considerable demands on their time.

The addition of new responsibilities to the Management Committee (such as dealing with OPs, and managing the website) and recognition that there should be a formal link between the management committee and the local conference organisers, lead to reconsideration of the committee responsibilities. A constitutional change was adopted at the Annual General Meeting such that all committee members now have portfolio responsibilities. The relevant paragraph of the Constitution will be amended to appear as follows:

"The affairs of the Society shall be in the hands of a Management Committee consisting of a President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, Editor of Proceedings, Newsletter Manager, Web Site Manager, Publications Manager, Convenor of the Conference Organising Committee and Immediate Past President, each of whom shall be members of the Society."

In recognition of the above changes to the responsibilities of Management Committee, the Annual General Meeting passed a recommendation to the incoming Committee to develop job descriptions for each portfolio and present them for ratification at the 1999 AGM.

In order to achieve increased satisfaction of members, the Society must find a way to harness the enthusiasm of some members, without burdening them with administrative tasks. The Management Committee feels the way to achieve this is by the formation of Special Interest Groups (SIGs).

Special Interest Groups

A SIG is a group of scientists with particular interests in a given area, led by one or more champions. The SIGs will provide an opportunity for active members to direct the functioning of the Society with respect to their own area of interest. Not all members will wish to belong to a SIG, and some members may be actively involved in more than one SIG. It is envisioned that SIGs will be dynamic groupings with new ones being formed and old ones adapting or becoming extinct. Some SIGs may merge together and others may split. The SIGs may be formed by discipline area (animal breeding, behaviour, genetics, growth, lactation, meat, nutrition, physiology, reproduction,

welfare, wool etc), by species (dairy cattle, beef cattle, sheep, deer, goats, dogs, horses, pigs) or other factors (global warming, sustainability, genetically modified food, voluntary feed intake, supplementary feeding of dairy cows).

Members would be surveyed to elect to abstain or join in one or more SIGs. It is expected that at least half of the 500 members would not actively belong to a SIG. The SIGs would be empowered and would have responsibilities. They would be able to manage, within constraints, their interests in the Conference programme. The SIGs would drive any OP initiatives. The SIGs may replace some current groups that exist outside NZSAP (eg NZ Genetical Society). SIGs would be the NZSAP voice for their interest. Some possible roles of the SIGs within the context of NZSAP activities are suggested and expanded in the following sections. It is expected that the SIGs would be proactive, making suggestions to the Management Committee as to their desires and plans, rather than vice versa.

In order to ensure that this development proceeds, the AGM created an operating guideline for Management Committee. This states that the incoming Management Committee forms SIGs for a trial period of two years. These groups will have an active role in determining the structure of the Annual Conference and providing expert commentary when necessary on behalf of the Society.

Conference

The Conference has been characterised by unprecedented growth (Shackell, 1996) from less than 40 papers in the 1970's increasing to up to 60 papers in the 1980's and over 90 papers in the 1990's. This has considerably increased the workload of the Management Committee, Editor and Conference Organisers. Increasingly, these individuals have received flak from authors and other members regarding decisions about the acceptance, duration, and positioning of individual papers within the Conference programme. The Conference timing has changed, from February to June, for a trial period to better fit in with undergraduate semesterisation and the timing of postgraduate programmes. The location of the Conference has been simply determined by a rotation around the four science catchments (Waikato, Manawatu, Canterbury, Otago). In practice, the physical conferences could (and perhaps should) be held anywhere. In terms of timing, location and material, it may be that SIGs identify special needs that are best met with a satellite conference, or perhaps regional presentations. For example, a regional series of meetings on a topic coinciding with the release of an OP.

In terms of format, the increasing number of papers leads to the need for a longer conference (an option not favoured by members) or concurrent sessions (not always favoured by the presenters) or shorter presentations. Earlier conferences had tried the mini-poster format, but this relies on the audience reading the abstracts in advance of the presentations. The 1998 conference trialled five minute presentations with three minutes of questions and it was found that this provided sufficient time in most cases to present the necessary details. However, material to be presented at the Conference may be broadly classified as suit-

able to all members, or suitable for experts in a particular discipline area (ie members of one SIG). In some years it may be desirable to hold concurrent sessions to encourage discussion by those experts with a particular interest in the subject. In other years, quite different material might be presented, with a view to enlighten members in the audience that are outside the SIG. At present, the Conference committee and management committee decide on the format and structure of the Conference, where this would be better carried out on a SIG by SIG basis, for at least some of the Conference offerings.

It is recommended that the Convenor of the Local Organising Committee take a more active role in designing the Conference, in conjunction with SIG Champions. The Convenor should accordingly be a position on the Management Committee, with an associated one-year term of office. It would also be useful if a draft longer-term plan was adopted for Conference themes. For example, one year might involve industry sessions with no concurrent presentations. The next year may be organised around discipline groups, with heavy science placed in concurrent sessions. On some occasions, sessions might be linked to reviews such as undertaken by FoRST or Foresight. The separation of research from technology development, and basic from applied science, might make some Conferences more attractive to sectors of the science community that do not regularly attend our conference, such as farmers. Sessions that look to future opportunities and the way these may be met might be of more interest to science managers than are the presentation of previous findings.

The change to pre-publish the Proceedings has been favourably viewed by members, despite the doubt by many that such an exercise was achievable. This change was facilitated by the shifting in Conference timing, such that the peer review and editing occurred along much the same time frame as was normally the case when the Proceedings were post-published. The time-frame for developing and presenting material for OPs still leaves much to be desired. One possibility is for these publications, in future, to be driven by a SIG and linked into a particular Conference timeframe. That is, the material would be prepared with a Conference deadline and the OP material presented at that meeting – perhaps a special meeting aimed at a different audience from the usual Conference attendees. For example, the material being prepared for the OP on crossbreeding would have been ideal for a series of regional meetings and the rigour of a fixed timeframe would prevent the gradual erosion of the delivery date that seems a feature in recent years. Such a change would also consolidate the duties of the Editor, and move greater responsibilities to the authors, referees and SIG champions.

The website initiatives have required significant Society resources, but have future-proofed our publication options. In time, it is likely that we can deliver papers electronically, at less cost to the Society than current hard-copy publications, and with greater versatility to the member. I would certainly appreciate the ability to free up some shelf space and use a CD-ROM to print out those papers that I

needed for a particular project, or to give to a student, rather than indefinitely loaning a copy of the Proceedings. Further development of the list-server to support various SIGs would also be desirable.

Newsletter

The newsletter currently includes occasional editorial comments by invitation, and timely notices. In future, it may have a greater role in reporting activities of SIGs. It may also have a role in reporting information (perhaps as single-page inserts) that is worthy of publication, but not suitable for inclusion in the Proceedings. This includes reporting on some Conference presentations, such as discussion sessions or industry speakers. The Newsletter Editor should really be the Manager of the Newsletter rather than the Editor of the copy, as has been the role in the past.

Awards

The Society presents two forms of rewards – awards of recognition and financial assistance awards. The awards recognising individual merit include the Jubilee Award for leading third-year Animal Science students at each of Massey and Lincoln universities, the Young Members Award for research, written and oral communication, the (new in 1998) Science & Technology Award, the Sir Arthur Ward Award and the McMeekan award.

The financial assistance awards are funded from interest earned through the investment of Society capital. For various reasons, these awards have now developed to be primarily travel awards, and tend to provide only partial funding. The awards are offered several times per year and are highly contested, but applications tend to come from only a few research groups. The Society could and should obtain greater benefit from these awards than is currently the case. This is the fault of the Society, and not the awardees. For example, awardees could be required to link the findings from their travel to a subsequent Conference programme, SIG activity or newsletter.

Occasional Publications

The Society has had some tremendous success with a few of its OPs, whereas the demand for others has proven somewhat disappointing. In recent years, we have also encountered competition with other organisations, such as funding providers and employers wanting the material published under their own banner. In many cases the gestation lengths for these publications are much longer than desired. In addition, the material becomes dated and updating is somewhat problematic, especially for publications that were developed without an electronic version as a basis for new modifications. The Management Committee needs also to improve the monitoring of costs and returns for each publication, across years, to enable more informed decision regarding future investment in reprinting, updating or translating OPs to other languages.

In future, OPs could be developed by SIGs and could be linked to Conference material to tighten deadlines. Regional meetings could follow their release to ensure greater publicity and increase initial sales. There are also web opportunities for delivering this material. In some cases, university students are the major ongoing customers that pur-

chase these publications and the material should therefore be developed in close collaboration with teaching staff in the relevant areas.

Measuring Satisfaction

It is all very well to identify increased satisfaction as a goal for our members. This goal is clearly achievable, as I have yet to meet a perfectly satisfied scientist. However, one should also have some key performance indicators that measure the success of the President, Management Committee and SIGs in achieving increased satisfaction. Unfortunately, it is not obvious to me as to what these indicators should be. As commented earlier, satisfaction cannot be measured by simply counting the number of members, or conference attendees or by inspecting the net asset base. In this case, we may have to leave these measures to common sense and gut feeling, rather than using a readily quantifiable measure. I would hope that in retrospect it would be obvious when increased satisfaction has been attained.

The Next Generation of Members

The Society attracts a steady influx of new members, primarily derived from new scientific appointments and from current postgraduate students. A disappointing proportion of these new members tend to last only a few years, often moving and being struck off the membership after three years of delinquent membership. Presumably this indicates they fail to achieve ongoing satisfaction from their membership, despite the relatively modest annual charges. I believe that for many members the opportunity to publish and the attendance of the Annual Conference is an important contributor to their achieving satisfaction from membership. However, I also believe that the number of members is not an adequate measure of the success of the Society – I would prefer a smaller number of enthusiastic members that contribute to the objects of the Society rather than a large number of lackadaisical and uninspiring members.

The Society is interested in the promotion of Animal Science and this is not readily achieved by limiting our discussion to current members – that is simply preaching to the converted. It is important that we nurture our next generation of scientists and provide them with the encouragement that will allow them to identify the satisfying elements that can be associated with careers in Animal Science. I believe this must be achieved during the formative student years, preferably during secondary school education, if not before. Accordingly, the Society has provided funds to the Science Fairs in the four main science catchments as prizes for animal related exhibits. Unfortunately there are few such exhibits and this investment has primarily rewarded those students that already had an interest, rather than stimulating interest in new students. Furthermore, in three of the four catchments, the Science Fair organisers have shown little interest in our involvement, other than in securing prize monies. In 1998 we assisted with funding of the CREST (Creativity in Science & Technology) programme. In par-

ticular, we partially supported a mail out to all secondary schools that included some material on exciting aspects of agricultural science. It is hoped that financial and people support for the CREST endeavours might continue in the future.

Name Change

It has been generally accepted that the current name of the Society is not entirely acceptable. There has been suggestion, not unanimously agreed on, that the word Production should be replaced with the word Science, as has occurred with the recent change in the British Society of Animal Production and their associated journal. However, simply changing Science to Production does not really go far enough whereas the term Animal & Food Science is really too broad in relation to our interests. I feel that many members would favourably consider a name change, provided a better name can be identified. We have yet to achieve this and I am sure the Management Committee would welcome any thoughts from the membership.

Making Change Happen

This review of the Future of the Society, starting with some previous Presidential addresses, and considering the outcomes from Conference workshop at the Lincoln meeting, has led me to some useful conclusions. We are an Association of Scientists, and our goal should be to improve the satisfaction of our members. A slight amendment of our objects, and modification of the positions on management committee and their relative portfolios could achieve this. The creation and empowering of SIGs to harness the ideas and enthusiasm of members that are not current officeholders in the Management Committee offers a change to our modus operandi that could lead to improved satisfaction.

The AGM has introduced an operating guideline for Management Committee to trial SIGs for a period of two years. The President has the responsibility of reporting the actions taken by Management Committee. However, the success or otherwise of this approach relies on a few members demonstrating a vision for their area of interest, and a willingness to turn their vision into reality. I await the results with interest.

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