

New Zealand Society of Animal Production online archive

This paper is from the New Zealand Society for Animal Production online archive. NZSAP holds a regular annual conference in June or July each year for the presentation of technical and applied topics in animal production. NZSAP plays an important role as a forum fostering research in all areas of animal production including production systems, nutrition, meat science, animal welfare, wool science, animal breeding and genetics.

An invitation is extended to all those involved in the field of animal production to apply for membership of the New Zealand Society of Animal Production at our website www.nzsap.org.nz

[View All Proceedings](#)

[Next Conference](#)

[Join NZSAP](#)

The New Zealand Society of Animal Production in publishing the conference proceedings is engaged in disseminating information, not rendering professional advice or services. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of the New Zealand Society of Animal Production and the New Zealand Society of Animal Production expressly disclaims any form of liability with respect to anything done or omitted to be done in reliance upon the contents of these proceedings.

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).



You are free to:

Share— copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format

Under the following terms:

Attribution — You must give [appropriate credit](#), provide a link to the license, and [indicate if changes were made](#). You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.

NonCommercial — You may not use the material for [commercial purposes](#).

NoDerivatives — If you [remix, transform, or build upon](#) the material, you may not distribute the modified material.

<http://creativecommons.org.nz/licences/licences-explained/>

Presidential Address 2007

The Society's role in being empathetic to the animal production industry

C.R. BURKE

Dexcel Ltd, Private Bag 3221, Hamilton, New Zealand



Mark Twain once said, "Its better to keep your mouth shut and appear stupid...than to open it and remove all doubt". I considered my strength as President to be more of stewardship than visionary. Alas, it is with some risk to fulfilling Mark Twain's prophecy that I continue with this address. I referred to some of the

previous Presidential Addresses; to get a feel for what was expected. Certainly, if the Society was to undertake all the "must-do's" and follow all the visions put forward, we would have made Microsoft Corporation seem like a cake-stall operation by now.

I think the take home message here is to be cautious of the President, who is but one person with one opinion who shares it once a year. Some of the visions and "must-do's" that I came across seemed too complex and stretched to me; as though the New Zealand Society of Animal Production was going to be everything to everybody involved in the animal production industry. We could be a political power swaying the Government to spend more money on animal research funding. We could be a lead provider of innovative technologies to the animal production industries. We could be....and so on.

Should the Society work more closely with animal producers?

The notion that the New Zealand Society of Animal Production should focus on initiatives that increase our farmer membership crops up from time to time. I think this would be difficult to achieve, but more importantly, I think the Society fills a niche that does not involve a direct linking or accountability to the farming community. I do not mean to contradict the great initiatives shown with our Occasional Publications, which do have some direct value to farmers; nor do I mean to contradict the initiative of the current Conference to have a farmer-oriented day. By in large, however, I sense that the Society's empathy for the animal production industry should not be at the farmer directly, but mostly for those people that serve this industry. Here's why I think this to be the case.

Firstly, the task would require an in-depth understanding of farmers needs.

What do farmers want from knowledge providers?

When Doug Leeder, Chair of the Dairy InSight Board and Jim van der Poel, Chair of the Dexcel Board presented themselves at the Dexcel Conference last year, they told us what farmers want. These were:

1. Value
 2. Empathy, and
 3. Independence (from sales)
- Doug Leeder, Chairman, Dairy InSight Board*
4. Research to work on BIG discoveries
 5. Farmers to communicate directly with the scientists

Jim van der Poel, Chairman, Dexcel Board

What is empathy?

The most challenging requirement to successfully serve an end-user of knowledge is the ability to be truly empathetic to them. Empathy is "the capacity for participation in another's feelings or ideas". For example, I can empathize with the next five speakers contesting the Young Member Award. They are probably preoccupied, running their slides through their head. Self-doubt may be threatening their confidence. With empathy I can add value in the form of some timely advice, such as: You are already successful; you are in a "safe" environment; we all want you to do a good job; we celebrate our successors; it will be over soon and you will feel elated; do not forget to breathe!

Advising farmers is a "crowded space"

Farmer's time is valuable and the competition for their attention is immense. Their mail boxes overflow with information, and the majority of it goes straight into the trash. I know this from first hand experience. Advising farmers requires a high degree of empathy for their business and personal goals. As scientists we become very involved and knowledgeable on a particular topic, and perhaps believe farmers should be equally passionate about it. My personal interest and passion is dairy cow reproduction. I have learnt however that, while dairy farmers must have good procedures in place to get cows back in calf, and a genuine desire to achieve a high level of competence, dairy cow fertility is not the subject that consumes them the most. Issues such as the "milk payout", the weather and obtaining skilled labour are much bigger issues for the majority of them. Growing more grass, utilising

it better and getting high milksolids production are also high priorities. Somewhere down the list is my own topic of passion. As scientists we must be very mindful that our personal passion maybe considered but a single piece in a jigsaw to a farmer or farm advisor - and it has to be the right shape.

There are many “knowledge-based” organisations that are already charged to serve animal producers in this regard. In the dairy industry for example there are numerous means by which farmers receive advice. Dexcel (now DairyNZ), Fonterra and Livestock Improvement Corporation (LIC) (via Farmwise) are corporate bodies that have agents in the field advising dairy farmers. There are many more private consultancy businesses providing a one-on-one service. Advice also comes from bankers and veterinarians. For good or bad, sales representatives influence farmer decision-making. Farmers themselves are often thought of as the best source of advice. Most, if not all, of these factions are represented in our membership base. A move to attract more farmers to our Society would simply be competing with these organisations already charged with delivering knowledge and innovation to the farming community. Additionally, providing good advice to animal producers is a challenging role and the Society is not purposely structured or empowered to directly serve the farming communities in this fashion.

The Society's empathy should be for its members

If our end-user is primarily the animal farming industry, should we be concerned that we have very few farmer members or targeted programmes for farmers? No we shouldn't. I agree with former President, Dorian Garrick when he noted in his 1998 Presidential Address that "we are an association of scientists, and our goal should be to improve the satisfaction of our members" (Garrick, 1999). The term "scientist" should be interpreted in its broadest sense. A scientist could be defined as a "seeker of knowledge and provider of innovation". By this definition, the farmer and industry members that we do have probably come wearing a scientist's hat. Examples such as Mac Hanna and Geoff Nicoll spring to mind.

Our Society does have a crucial role to play within the animal production industry, although it is not one that requires a direct interdependence with animal producers. We are near the origin of the supply chain for knowledge and innovation. Our connections to industry are many, but they are largely indirect. In agreement again with Dorian Garrick (1999), "Members obtain satisfaction from NZSAP because it can add to, but not compete with the activities of their employer organisations". The Society fills a niche for animal scientists and innovators to nurture the common need of

communication and recognition, irrespective of geographical and disciplinary differences.

"If you try to be everything to everyone you'll lose the most valuable asset of all...your own identity and worth"

The Society already has a very important role to play. That role is to help us as individuals to better participate within industry. We can communicate freely within the Society's "walls". We can achieve scientific rigor and a means of publishing, before this knowledge is extended for adoption by the industry. We can enjoy the company of likeminded people, and the excitement of important discussions or debates. We can develop and take new ideas on board.

The Society plays a critical nurturing role. It nurtures innovation, but more importantly it nurtures those who are innovative, and those destined to be innovative in the future.

Nurturing innovation

There are numerous examples of great innovations being initially presented and debated using our Society as the conduit. Let's go back to the Inaugural NZSAP Conference, held in the Masonic Hall, Wellington, 1941. The last page lists the 66 Foundation Members. The page before this summarizes a study by J.P. James of the "Ruakura Agricultural Research Station" on the use of artificial insemination in cattle. James concludes with, "When some of the details in storing and handling the semen have been improved this method of breeding could be used in New Zealand to spread the services from outstanding sires, over a much larger group of cows than would be possible with natural matings." Collecting, processing and using bull semen is now a multi-million dollar industry and a routine part of dairy farming. These steps are taken for granted.

If we move on 60 years to the 2002 Proceedings, Jenny Jago, Murray Woolford *et al.* presented their work on automating the milking operation in pasture-grazed dairy cows. It may be considered inconceivable in another 60 years time than human labour was used to milk cows...or dare I say it...that cows were milked at all.

What might the future hold for the ways in which farming will be conducted in the future? More than likely you will here it here at a Society Conference first. This fact should leave us in no doubt our Society plays a valuable role in nurturing innovation for the animal production industries. More specifically, it feeds the provider organisations by nurturing their employees.

Celebrating success and honouring those who are successful

We can celebrate our successes, and honour those who are successful. Scientists thrive on recognition...they perhaps demand it above all else. While the McMeekan Memorial Award is the "mother of all awards", each year the Society bestows a number awards that recognise special achievement in various aspects related to progress in animal production.

Nurturing our successors

An objective of the Society is to assist young people in a manner that develops an interest in the science of food and fibre production. Despite what the doomsayers have said, agriculture is by no means a "sunset" industry. This is certainly true for dairying. The sheep enterprise may be struggling at present, and deer industry has its ups and downs. But the "wheel keeps turning", as anyone who has been in the animal production business for more than 10 years knows. We desperately need a steady influx of bright young talent to ensure New Zealand's strength in supplying food and fibre, and other animal products, remains vibrant and progressive. The Society supports students to develop their skills in this regard. It is duty bound to contribute to this future capability in the best way it can.

Additionally, "talent scouts" representing the various corporations and businesses involved in animal production are ever present at Conferences. Members who actively contribute to the affairs of the Society, including Conference presentations, are advertising themselves; wittingly or unwittingly! This is particularly the case for the young members who can still consider the world as their oyster, and themselves a "stem-cell". I see their involvement in the New Zealand Society of Animal Production as a very useful part of developing their own career potential.

SUMMARY

In summary, being in partnership with the animal production industry is a prerequisite to having a successful career if your product is knowledge and innovation that adds value to the industry. As individuals we have a responsibility to ensure we develop the capacity to empathise with our end-users. Empathy requires "the capacity to participate in another's feelings or ideas". This is no easy task. There are institutions and companies that are interdependent within the farming community, through an advanced understanding or empathy for farmers. These organisations are already strongly represented within the Society's membership base, and are supportive of the Society.

The primary role for the Society should be to empathise with its members who serve to introduce new developments into the animal production industry through their respective employers. My interpretation of this key role would lead us to focus on ensuring that the format and quality of both the Conference and the Proceedings supports members to be successful in their endeavours of serving the animal production industry; honouring those that are successful, and nurturing our successors. The animal production industry at-large should recognise the importance of what we do. The New Zealand Society of Animal Production should be proud of what we do and the value we create for the New Zealand animal production industry.

REFERENCES

- Garrick, D.J. 1999: Presidential address 1998: The future for the N.Z. Society of Animal Production. *Proceedings of the New Zealand Society of Animal Production* **59**:1-5.
- Jago, J.; Copeman, P.; Bright, K.; McLean, D.; Ohnstad, I.; Woolford, M. 2002: An innovative farm system combining automated milking with grazing. *Proceedings of the New Zealand Society of Animal Production* **62**:115-119.
- James, J.P. 1941: Artificial insemination in cattle. *Proceedings of the New Zealand Society of Animal Production* **1**:58.