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Presidential Address 2013

Is it time for changes in the New Zealand Society of Animal Production?

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Introduction

At approximately ten year intervals, the President's address includes a review of society's activities (Andrews 1963; Everitt 1973; Smith 1984; Nicol 1992; Morrow 2004). Therefore, it is appropriate that I do so again. In addition, the society is facing the reality of falling paper numbers and attendance at conferences. Coinciding with this is a change in the generation of active scientific members within the society. Therefore, my address will also outline my thoughts on these issues moving forward.



relationship to continue with the next joint conference to be in 2016.

In 2010, it was proposed that each conference should celebrate at least one of our more distinguished members, as they progress towards the end of their scientific career. Therefore the 'Living Legend' lecture was introduced in 2011. The aim is for the individual to present an address that covers "their" work. Aspects such as where they started/ended up, highlights, impacts of that work on industry, current and future philosophy can be included.

These have been a huge success and provided wonderful insights on the careers of some of our more distinguished members.

In the last ten-year period, the society has produced two new occasional publications. These are Occasional Publication 14: 'Pasture and Supplements for Grazing Animals' (which replaced and updated Occasional Publication 10: 'Livestock Feeding on Pasture') and Occasional Publication 15: 'Managing Mineral Deficiencies in Grazing Livestock'. Both of these books have been well received and we thank the authors for their significant efforts. In the current environment, where employers are not always willing for staff to spend significant amounts of time writing these books, this is becoming more difficult and expensive. The society might need to consider new models in the future for the production of occasional publications.

Membership

The membership has fluctuated with a peak of over 700 during the 1980s. Currently, the society has 430 members, which is not that dissimilar to that reported by Morrow (2004). Previous presidents have also reported the occupation of the membership (Andrews 1963; Everitt 1973; Smith 1984; Watson 1994; Morrow 2004) however, our current records are well out of date, so this cannot be undertaken. An example of this is that many of my generation are still listed as students, as the society does not have a ready mechanism to update individual membership occupation. The society in the future may wish to discuss a mechanism to address this issue, if it is deemed of importance.

New activities

The last ten years have seen a change in the destinations used for our conferences, from the traditional bases of Hamilton, Lincoln University, Massey University and Dunedin. The society has held conferences in Wanaka, Napier, Invercargill and Brisbane. The latter destination was due to the successful partnership formed, on a four-yearly basis, with the Australian Society of Animal Production. These joint meetings have been well attended and enjoyed. In 2008, many of our membership travelled to Brisbane for the first joint conference, and in 2012 more than 50 Australian members attended the joint conference at Lincoln. It is planned for this

Conference and proceedings

Over the last ten years, the society has continued to have a spread of papers across disciplines (Table 1) and species (Table 2). Within the disciplines, there has been an apparent increase in the percentage of papers in the 'Breeding' category, and a decrease in 'Reproduction' and 'Physiology' based papers. The additional category of 'Lactation' has been added, as it is now possible to separate these papers from 'Reproduction', and this might explain some of the apparent drop-off in this category. Within species, a clear reduction in the percentage of papers in 'Beef cattle' has occurred, with an apparent increase in 'Deer' and 'Horse' papers. It will be of interest to determine if this level of increase is

Table 1 Papers classified by predominant discipline¹.

	1973-83	1984-92	1993-2002	2003-2012
Breeding	11.7	5.9	5.7	12.5
Nutrition	20.1	12.4	13.9	15.5
Reproduction	18.0	23.2	16.5	8.9
Disease/parasites	6.9	8.9	9.2	9.5
Growth/meat	13.0	16.8	12.7	11.1
Pastures	5.5	5.0	4.6	1.5
Behaviour	4.4	1.4	3.3	2.8
Economics	4.0	0.7	8.3	2.5
Physiology	5.2	7.4	11.0	2.8
General	11.1	2.3	1.6	2.1
Modelling		2.0	3.8	4.9
Biotechnology		0.9	1.1	5.5
Wool		13.1	8.3	4.8
Lactation				6.8
Total No	477	564	939	673

¹Adapted from Smith (1984) and Morrow (2004).

Table 2 Papers classified by predominant species¹.

	1973-83	1984-92	1993-2002	2003-2012
Dairy cattle	18.0	12.1	32.4	38.6
Beef cattle	16.8	6.6	12.1	4.0
Sheep	48.4	55.3	38.2	34.5
Pig	1.3		0.3	0.3
Poultry			0.3	0.1
Rabbit			0.3	0.0
Fish (shellfish)			0.2	0.6
Deer	1.5	6.2	3.7	7.0
Goat	0.2	6.6	2.6	1.2
Horse	0.2		0.3	2.5
Rodent	0.2		1.2	0.3
General/other	13.4	13.3	8.4	10.8
Total No	477	564	939	673

¹Adapted from Smith (1984) and Morrow (2004).

maintained in deer related papers, given the state of that industry at present.

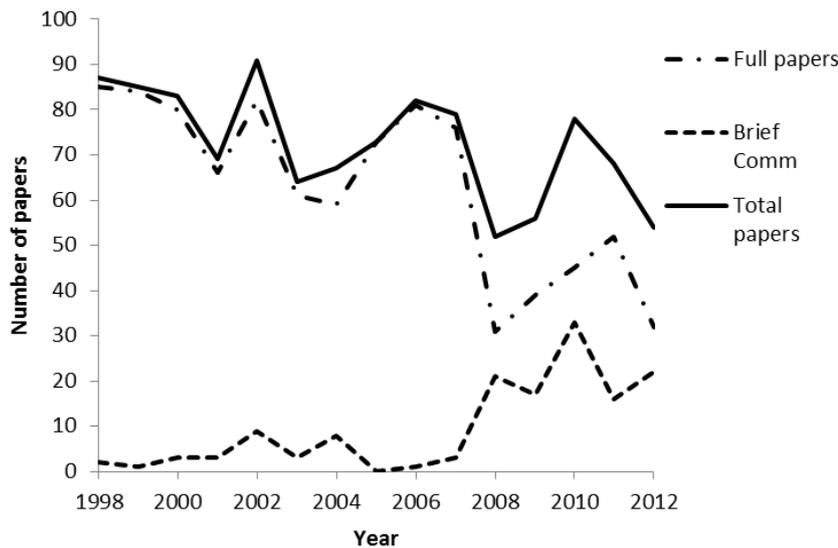
There has been a decline in the absolute numbers of papers since the highs of the 1990s. The 1993 to 2002 period averaged approximately 90 papers per conference, compared to approximately 70 in the last ten year period. Figure 1 indicates a general decline in the number of papers presented each year since 2002. In addition, the type of papers written in our proceedings has changed significantly. In response to the scientific membership wanting to be able to present their work to both their New Zealand colleagues and to our readership, while still being able to publish their work in a peer-reviewed international journal, there has been a steady increase in the number of brief communication papers. While many of the membership may prefer our 'little red book' to maintain its focus on full papers, I see the change to an increase in brief communications as a means of keeping the communication channels with our membership/readership open, by encouraging

scientists to still publish within our society. It should not be underestimated the pressure university staff are under, through government PBRF funding, to publish all of their work in international peer-reviewed journals only, with far less value attributed to scientific work solely published at New Zealand conferences. A significant proportion of papers in our proceedings have university staff as co-authors. In addition, many post-graduate students, who are either aiming for higher study or employment, believe a publication in an international peer-reviewed journal is of more value to them than in a conference proceedings, and are therefore less willing to publish in our proceedings with a full paper. I believe we should continue to encourage post-graduate students to publish in our society and the brief communication allows for this. By publishing in our proceedings, young scientists learn the skills of paper writing, defending an argument and how to orally communicate their science. It also allows them to rub shoulders with, and learn from, senior scientists.

A further explanation for the drop-off in paper numbers is the 2008 and 2012 joint conferences with our Australian Society of Animal Production colleagues. At these conferences, authors have had the opportunity to publish their work as a full refereed paper in the journal entitled 'Animal Production Science' rather than in our proceedings. In future years, our society might wish to consider publishing the abstracts, at least, from these papers within our proceedings, so that some of this new knowledge and science is passed onto our membership.

It is also important to acknowledge that while papers numbers may be dropping, the numbers published per year are still well above the average of 50 per year observed in the 1970s and 1980s. A change the society may need to consider is moving from a three-day to a two-day conference format. With fewer papers, attendance at the conference may decline and therefore it might be cost-prohibitive to hold three-day conferences in the future. I also believe it time for the society to seriously consider

Figure 1 Number of papers per year.



encouraging more ‘industry’/‘farmer’ written papers, with less of a ‘pure-science’ focus. These additional papers will not only provide new useful information to the current membership/readership, they may also help to increase our membership and conference attendance. We have in the past as a society dabbled in this area with contract session papers with some degree of success. I think also, as a society, further discussion is required to determine if we actually know our ‘space’ - is it science or production or both? The New Zealand Grasslands Society regularly has more than 200 at its conference, as it is attractive to a wide audience, ranging from scientists and industry members to farmers. It has achieved this by allowing for a broader range of papers, and focusing on industry issues as well as science.

Authors

While reviewing the papers published in the last ten years, I took the opportunity, using data now collected via electronic databases, to examine our authors. To date, there have been 2951 individual authors/co-authors in our society’s history. With 72 conferences to date, this equates to an average of 42 new authors/co-authors each year. However, our membership and conference attendance has stagnated, especially in the last ten years. One could ask the question “why are these new authors not becoming more involved with our society?” The answer to that could be in the fact that 61 % of all authors only publish once in our proceedings, 21% two- to three-times, and less than 5% more than 12 times. These data suggest that this society has relied on a core of authors to maintain momentum.

Changes I have observed and comments on the future

I first presented at the society in 1998 (Kenyon et al. 1998) in the wool session. In that conference, there were 88 papers, of which 12 were based on wool. In 2013, there were 48 papers at the conference, with just three on wool. This is a reflection on the changes we have observed in the production industries. In addition, of all of the authors/co-authors in the 1998 proceedings, only five were again authors/co-authors in 2013. This somewhat staggering statistic indicates the change in generation of scientists the society has had in the last 16 year period. Greer (2012), in his presidential address, alluded to

the fact that there are now relatively few ‘aged’ staff (those over 60 years) at our scientific organisations, indicating those significant contributors to the society in the last 30 years have retired, and taken with them a significant amount of knowledge and experience. Therefore, it is now time for the ‘younger’ generation/membership to decide how they would like the society to look in the future. The membership needs to decide if we wish to continue to go it alone, or have more joint conferences with other societies, and may need to consider whether our ‘little red book’ is suitable to meet future needs in its current structure, as I alluded to earlier. Joint conferences may offer more variety and introduce new members to the society. It is also possible that other societies may be struggling to publish their own work, and it might be suitable to include other material in our proceedings. As I also alluded to earlier, the society needs to consider whether it is production- or science-based, or both, and do we actually know where we sit now? Further, in the age of electronic databases, as a society are we well placed? In the early 2000s we moved to the SciQuest system. However, that system is relatively out-dated compared to many newer systems, and is actually only subscribed to by a small number of institutions and individuals. If we want our science to have a greater worldwide audience, a change is required.

Conclusion

In summary, I believe that the society is still very active, and while the number of papers may be in decline, it is still plays an important role in both the New Zealand scientific community and the animal industries it serves. New innovations, like the Living Legends addresses and the joint conferences with our Australian colleagues, have been a huge success. However the society does need to continue to change

and to progress to meet the needs of its current and future members. This will require further debate, which needs to be led by the younger members of the society. We should not forget that the society did survive when it moved from post- to pre-conference paper writing and publication, and from overhead to PowerPoint presentations. I wonder what changes the next ten years will bring.

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