



“THE CHALLENGES OF CHANGE”
CHRISTCHURCH, NEW ZEALAND

23RD COMMONWEALTH
AGRICULTURAL CONFERENCE

CONFERENCE REPORT

15-17 NOVEMBER 2008

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FOREWORD

THE 23RD COMMONWEALTH AGRICULTURAL CONFERENCE LIVED UP TO ITS TITLE “THE CHALLENGES OF CHANGE” AND VERY ‘DOWN TO EARTH’ IT WAS TOO.

The RASC Vice-President, HRH The Princess Royal, set the tone when she opened the Conference by challenging the delegates, particularly the Next Generation (NG—Under 35s) by saying that the value of the Conference is what part you take in it, what you make of it and what you do with what you have learned when you get home and she urged them to stay involved.

Continuing the challenge, Mick Lester, President, RAS of NZ, in his thought provoking paper asked four fundamental questions on the policies of Member Societies for the tougher times ahead. *It’s in the interest of every Society to read this paper (see page 11) and discuss it in the light of their own circumstances.*

Mick Lester spends much time and energy amongst young people, encouraging them to take an active part in the agricultural and pastoral societies or breed societies. He stretches across the Tasman Sea to similar young people in Australian societies. Through his efforts there was a strong NG contingent at the Conference

Unfortunately, His Excellency Kamalesh Sharma, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, could not be with us but sent a video message saying the Conference subject was absolutely right for our times, particularly for the Commonwealth within which are 370 million who go hungry every day. He enumerated the powerful forces that are re-shaping global agriculture and the immediate challenges it has to face.

The 53 Commonwealth nations, in which we are part, is the largest group of independent countries in the world apart from the UN, with 30% of the world’s population and two common languages, English and Agriculture!

The Minister of Agriculture, Hon. Jim Anderton outlined the importance of the agricultural industry to the national economy saying that it accounted for 65% of the national export earnings, out performing every other sector for the last 25 out of 27 years.

This attitude was reflected during the visits on the Pre-Conference Tour in the North Island. Producers readily quoted production figures giving the feeling that with a market for only 4 million people nationally they were competing for their livelihood in the international food market.

These Farm Tours provide a valuable opportunity to experience a whole range of production systems between equator and near tundra, depending on Conference venue. What a privilege and education.

It was felt that the CEOs and NGs seminars together with their joint meeting later had produced very useful and helpful discussions on Society matters. .

Those on the Post-Conference Tour were fulsome in their praise for the trip. This was echoed by the NGs who for the first time organised their own Post Tour.

Another first; all speeches are on a CD ROM which will be sent to each delegate.

***Philip Bolam LVO
Hon. Press Secretary, RASC***

RASC VICE PRESIDENT, HRH THE PRINCESS ROYAL, OPENS THE CONFERENCE

HRH The Princess Royal said it was a privilege to attend the 23rd Commonwealth Agricultural Conference. HRH was attending in place of her Father, the President, who had felt the journey was rather too far at this stage in his career.

HRH was very encouraged to see so many young people, particularly in these days of financial turmoil, some had travelled considerable distances. It was a great opportunity to share experiences, to learn about the Commonwealth and its agriculture. The Commonwealth provided the opportunity for a breadth of membership of societies and agriculture not only for the production of food but in better land use generally.

The RASC over its 50 years had grown, changed and improved in both quality and productivity. These changes were important to ensure it was still relevant. Individual societies should share the responsibility and exert influence to bring other societies into membership. HRH was saddened to see that Nigeria and Ghana were not represented.

Delegates attending the Commonwealth Agricultural Conferences regularly could get a great deal out of RASC membership and HRH hoped that those attending for the first time so enjoyed it they would continue to take part in the future.

HRH The Princess Royal, speaking to the young people, said the value of the conference was what you did at it, what you made of it and what you did with what you had learned when you got home. In fact it could help you with your future career. She hoped they would all stay involved and maintain their new contacts and make the most of the greater network between Conferences.

**A WELCOME FROM
MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE FOR NEW ZEALAND,
HON. JIM ANDERTON**

The Minister gave a warm welcome to everyone attending the conference. He then gave a brief description of the agricultural industry's performance. New Zealand depended more on agricultural exports, food production and food processing for its economics and social well being than any other country on the planet.

In fact, it totalled 65 percent of their overseas earnings, out-performing every other sector for 25 out of the last 27 years.

Productivity has been 3 times higher on average than the general economy since the 1980's, the sector maintained NZ as a first world economy.

He said their small nation had earned, through hard graft, innovation and ingenuity, a world wide reputation for excellence and creativity in the development of their primary production. There was a willingness to grasp new technologies, adopt improved practices, particularly in breeding and genetics. He emphasised that investments made 30 years ago into research and development had paid off, and this concern to be science, research and development based was as strong as ever.

So, the Minister was delighted to be able to welcome the delegates to the conference and he felt they had come to the right place to talk about agriculture.

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS FROM THE
SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH,
HIS EXCELLENCY KAMALESH SHARMA**

The Secretary General conveyed his apologies for being unable to attend the Conference and gave a keynote address to delegates by video link...

“I send warm greetings from London to the delegates at the 23rd Commonwealth Agricultural Conference. I much regret that I cannot be with you in person.

Your subject is dear to us, and fresh, too: I record this message just days after a lively debate on food security and food prices, which took place between Commonwealth Heads of Government in New York. Some Commonwealth members stand to gain by the current turmoil; but more stand to lose.

I personally want us to bring our Commonwealth networks to bear in coordinating our responses to a world in agricultural and economic flux, because you meet at a time when a number of powerful forces are reshaping global agriculture. High food and energy prices, urbanization, globalisation, food safety and quality standards, expanding bio fuel production, climate change: all of these are converging to transform agricultural production, markets and food consumption.

We see this in different ways. Grain prices have more than doubled in two years, and are not likely to fall. Climate change compounds the challenge of meeting global food demand: it has been projected that the yield from rain-fed agriculture in some countries may be cut in half in 10 years.

Our small island states are already experiencing diminishing fish stocks. Before our very eyes, the staples of global food demand are shifting...and yet issues of food safety and quality standards are stopping small-scale producers from entering the market. Meanwhile the interrupted Doha Round is grappling with the implications - for the global food supply - of internal supports and external subsidies in developed countries.

Food is a basic human right, and your and our first priority is to feed the 370 million people in the Commonwealth who go hungry each and every day. That number could rise: if rice prices increase by just 10%, we estimate that another 400,000 households in Bangladesh will fall into poverty.

The second priority is to raise agricultural productivity. That's a task which calls for a new policy – in removing subsidies in developed countries, for instance, and in launching serious research, as well as new public-private funding mechanisms.

It also calls for new practice – in new irrigation, new seed technology, better pest control, more effective prevention of wastage, better infrastructure and storage, and better ways to ensure food safety standards for small-scale farmers.

The Commonwealth Secretariat is already playing its part. We're studying the effects of climate change on the agricultural sector, for instance, and training agricultural producers to meet food safety and quality standards.

Our technical experts are working alongside member governments to improve agricultural productivity. And the Commonwealth of Learning has a 'virtual' programme to advise farmers.

The Royal Agricultural Society of the Commonwealth, and all of you gathered in Christchurch, have a role to play. It will take *all* of our expertise, all our best ideas, and all our convening power, to ensure first and foremost that half a billion of our fellow Commonwealth citizens can rely on basic food security.”

The Secretary General concluded his message by conveying his good wishes for a successful and productive Conference.

SUMMARY OF CONFERENCE PAPERS BY PROFESSOR MALCOLM STANSFIELD

***THE FULL TEXT OF EACH PAPER IS AVAILABLE ON CD
COPIES MAY BE OBTAINED UPON REQUEST TO THE RASC BY EMAIL
rasc@commagshow.org OR VIA THE WEBSITE www.commagshow.org***

DAY 1 GLOBAL AGRICULTURAL DAY

The Maori welcoming ceremony was a unique start to the conference.

HE Kamalesh Sharma, The Commonwealth Secretary-General's message was highly relevant in setting the scene "The Challenge of Change".

Professor Hendricks clearly identified the complexity of overcoming poverty on the African continent. She identified many problems of the current crisis with higher food prices, competition for land use and over-confident speculation.

Although higher prices offer some opportunities for African farmers, a trade policy is needed to stimulate long term improvements in production.

Small farmers should be encouraged and enabled to feed their families with good diets but have a market and associated infrastructure to generate cash from additional production. They will need to deal with volatility and hopefully benefit from the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Plan – set up to assist the 48 African countries.

Dr Devendra dealt with similar situations in Asia, explaining the importance of mixed farming systems, particularly those on the very small farms. He outlined the role of the Green Revolution in crop production but emphasised that small livestock farmers in rain fed zones had been bypassed.

The role of animals – primarily sheep and cattle – was key to improving soil fertility, spreading risk and providing opportunities to add value to farm output. We must 'listen to farmers', assist them to develop more efficient production systems and urban marketing linkages.

The paper presented by Gary Johnson of Australia covered the micro aspects of surviving change on his 540ha property near Forbes, NSW. A short DVD outlined the farming system and especially the people involved (family, staff, customers, friends).

Gary detailed the challenges he faces with price volatility but confirmed the importance of irrigation in reducing the risk due to climate. He had identified the value of quality products e.g. Lucerne hay for export, though further expansion of the business seemed to be less attractive but he needed to be more professional in managing it. His triple bottom line comprised – financial, social and environmental.

The 3 papers had identified the many challenges ahead. Change was nothing new but should be avoided just for change's sake. Examples of possible solutions had been identified. The importance of the family was stressed by all 3 speakers. Policy makers have to be influenced but improvement will only start at farm level.. We heard that New Zealand farmers are SMART. If we are to overcome the many challenges outlined in this session, we, too, need to be even SMARTER.

DAY 2 AGRICULTURAL SOCIETIES DAY

A full day dealing with highly relevant topics – the operation of the various Societies and RASC.

The report of the NGs 2007 Zambia Project "Understanding and Assistance Mission" was so appropriate and it did achieve it's objectives. This was a great start to what hopefully will be a series of such events. We wish the NGs every success in the 2009 PNG project and look forward to hearing about it at the next conference.

The two reports from the CEO Seminar and the Next Generation Forum were most encouraging.

Summary of Conference Papers Continued...

The report by Jane Guise on the CEOs Seminar confirmed that all societies have to meet the 'Challenge of Change'. The fact that costs are rising at a time when show attendance is difficult to maintain and sponsorship to get, puts pressure on all involved. New income streams are being sought but the main factor is the importance of people.

The format of the NG Forum discussions proved to be most appropriate, with a series of short presentations from several delegates, followed by a talk from an invited "inspirational" speaker Dick Taylor (10k metre winner).

The presentation by Mick Lester on the RASNZ was outstanding, confirming that change was, in fact, possible. We need to listen to members, to sponsors and to negotiate the best arrangements. We must deal with succession in committees/trustees, provide appropriate entertainment for visitors and ensure effective communication.

A splendid joint presentation on the 'Bells, Whistles & Flashing Lights' of US State Fairs confirmed that in many ways they are different to our shows, but face similar challenges. Reinvestment in capital structures is difficult to justify but it is essential to deliver performance related management.

Some doubted the importance of 'Insurance' as a conference topic. But Gordon Smith's presentation, especially with the effects of climate change, was of real interest. The role of reinsurance was now less appropriate in the current financial situation, but the need of governments to be aware of the threats, if not picking up the costs, was highlighted.

The opportunity for RASC to assist in finding suitable candidates for the Marshal Papworth Scholarship Trust was exciting. Stephen Harris and Charles Reynolds explained the workings of the Trust and confirmed that 'Training trainers' for less developed countries was being planned.

The role of Show Societies in educating the young was clearly outlined by Ray Jones (Scotland) and John Rothwell (Adelaide). It

was confirmed that if the Society has developed an appropriate programme for school children, the teachers were willing to assist. Sponsorships were available but this may be a challenge initially.

Bill Proud's paper showed how effective marketing is a key to success in show attendance and therefore financial performance. Effective use of the internet, online ticket sales and 'loyal' attendees were part of an effective strategy.

The reports of the leaders of the three lunch time breakout sessions indicated that :-

1. There is an ongoing role for livestock at shows, in fact they are vital.
2. The option use of all resources available to management is the key to success.
3. Regulations, although an irritation, are essential and have to be dealt with.

Summary of Day 2 Papers

First thoughts – We must listen not only to farmers but to show attendees, sponsors and school teachers, too. As well as listening, we must plan effectively, manage resources well, but then take appropriate action to meet the "Challenge of Change".

Summary of Conference Papers Continued...

DAY 3

NEW ZEALAND AGRICULTURAL DAY

The conference room was still full; delegates must be enjoying the programme. No wonder, the papers have been relevant, informative and hopefully made us all think.

Pity the importance of New Zealand agriculture was left to the last – but so well worth waiting for!

Setting the scene, the Director General of MAFNZ, Murray Sherwin, clearly outlined the importance of the industry to New Zealand's prosperity, due to the high level of export sales and employment.

The use of all resources – soils, climate and topography is effectively taking place, especially human resources and intellectual property. The appropriate world markets have been identified and production encouraged to supply them.

A joint paper from Chris Horton and Kevin Lowe, of the Alma Baker Trust explained the role of the large Limestone Downs Property and how change continues to be required and undertaken. Sheep numbers have been markedly reduced since the price of wool fell so much, replaced by increased numbers of finishing beef cattle. They highlighted the need to seek new income streams, particularly a wind farm and possible conversion to milk production

Congratulations to the Trustees for identifying, and more to the point, funding research projects to benefit their business but other N.Z farmers as well and even world wide. Congratulations, too, for the project allowing a member of a UK Young Farmer's Clubs to gain work experience on Limestone Downs for a 3 month period.

We were privileged to have Andrew Ferrier, CEO, Fonterra describe the NZ dairy industry. Currently building a rapport with a new government, he has a vital role of milk products for NZ exports. He graphically described the rapid build-up of subsidies in the late '70s & early '80s and the swift withdrawal in 1984.

He then outlined ways in which the business continued to improve efficiency, for example, replacing road by rail transport for milk and the development of business in China, South America and other areas around the world, not only milk product sales but owning and operating dairy farms. He emphasised the considerable threat to Fonterra and all dairy farms from the proposed carbon charges.

Professor David Mellor explained the increasing need for producers to take Animal Welfare into consideration when designing and operating livestock farms. It became evident that standardised global regulations will be increasingly established. Single issue groups will have to be listened to and their views considered. NZ farmers had some of the highest welfare standards

Alistair Polson, farmer and Nuffield Scholar from Wanganui explained how the proposed carbon emissions trading system could cause financial problem to NZ farmers if implemented as currently proposed. He thought that white meat could take preference over beef and lamb.

The final paper from Jeremy Absolom of Rissington Breed Line was particularly interesting in respect of future sheep breeding and meat production. Genetic improvement has been widely undertaken with pigs, poultry and dairy cattle around the world, but the challenge to repeat the process with beef and sheep is being undertaken by Rissington.

Jeremy explained that the sheep meat market has to be demand driven. Producers need to understand their particular market and know their production costs. Improved genetics, if they are to benefit farmers, need to be associated with high levels of nutrition, husbandry and enterprise management.

FINAL SUMMARY OF CONFERENCE

A highly successful conference. The whole team are to be congratulated. “Challenge of Change” was a most appropriate title with widespread financial problems in most countries, appropriate, too, here in New Zealand with a farming industry that has and continues to deal with change.

The speakers kept to their subjects, presented in a most professional way and the visual aids were well used.

What have we learned ?

- that New Zealand farmers are a splendid example of massive change;
- that we need to listen to farmers, customers, staff and family members;
- whether in our business or Show Societies we need to provide what our customers want – this will change over time;
- we should also sharpen our marketing skills;
- have the confidence that change is possible, then enjoy the result;
- we should ‘look after’ our people and get the work/life balance in shape.

Regular conference attendees can be confident that the RASC continues to make real progress.

There are many more NG delegates present, appropriate papers have been identified and addressed and we have very much enjoyed ourselves

The first time attendees have seen how the RASC and its Conference can be of potential benefit to one’s career, business or show society. A splendid opportunity is available to network, make new friends and better understand what makes world of agriculture ‘tick’.

We should all give serious thought to what we’ve heard and seen, but especially consider how we can utilise this new knowledge in our own lives, farms or societies

What more can we ask of the organisers ?

We had –

- a great venue
- appropriate theme
- able speakers
- the presence of a Royal Vice-President

...and such splendid delegates from so many Commonwealth countries.

CHALLENGES & CHANGES FACING SOCIETIES BY PRESIDENT OF RAS OF NZ, MICK LESTER

In a thought provoking paper, which every Member Societies would do well to study and act on, Mick Lester reasons there are tougher times ahead for societies, so if they are to continue to serve their membership there are some pertinent questions to answer.

He points out that in New Zealand, agriculture's political clout has declined despite providing 65% of total exports. In addition, one of the greatest divisions in their overall society is the lack of understanding between urban and rural sectors, especially amongst children.

The RAS of NZ is an umbrella organisation for their 100 local shows and 65 breed societies. In the last six months they have asked all members, shows and breed societies what they want from them and what they expect from them. They were prepared for some hard consequences that would lead to the death of some sacred cows.

Mick Lester then posed questions to the delegates about their societies under 4 headings. Some are noted as follows :-

Planning for the Future

Do we have a 10 year plan and a mandatory review every 3 years ?

If the present competitions don't reflect reality, have we changed to meet the current situation? Have we caught up with the progress in recording of animals in the commercial environment and included competitions for these animals ?

Have we clear lines of demarcation between Governance and Management to enable both to do their job effectively?

Succession Planning

What is the age of the Governing Body? Of an age that can truly appreciate and understand what the next generation wants, to attract them to attend our shows.

How do we attract the young to be part of the show structure ? Ask them to attend meetings

If they are part of the committee do we LISTEN to them or really say "your time will come". Opinion suggests the latter is true.

Do we give the young responsibilities and hold meetings when they can attend, evening rather than afternoons to suit the retired?

Do we follow the corporate example in the age of those who are the leaders or up and coming leaders in the corporate world ? If so, we would not have the overwhelming majority of retired on our show committees.

(The President has put a great deal of time and effort working with the young in NZ and across the Tasman Sea with Australian societies)

Entertainment

We are in the entertainment business. Years ago we were the **must attend** event. Are we still, ahead of the game or sticking to what has been successful in the past ? This is a real challenge.

Sponsors

These are our most valuable friends. Without these, perhaps we wouldn't have a show. Only by retaining our relevance and importance in the entertainment industry will we continue to attract the harder sponsor support.

With a clear conscience can we say we do all we can to help them ? Do we, on a regular monthly basis, update them on our show planning ? Do we have a meaningful dialogue, a two way partnership with maximum exposure for them and see from their corporate experience how they could help ? Approaching a prospective new sponsor do we TELL them what we want them to sponsor ?

Thought provoking questions to stimulate action when costs are rising and incomes tending to fall.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICERS' SEMINAR

CHAIR: JANE GUISE (ROYAL BATH & WEST OF ENGLAND SOCIETY)

A. SHOWGROUND DEVELOPMENT

Charlie Smith of HOK Smith Forkner, an architect and planner specialising in showground redevelopment, gave the keynote speech. His Tennessee based company has experience of development on 180 showgrounds world-wide and estimates that 520 million people have visited an HOK facility in the last decade. As seminar sponsor, he gave an up-beat message for many Societies who have 'tired' facilities and striving to improve them against a background of difficult trading conditions. His advice is hard won, and certainly there are several UK Societies who would like him to visit and comment on their own particular challenges. Showground's are our biggest asset, there are many ways to make them work hard to support the important task of promoting agriculture. Charlie Smith has probably more useful tips for those contemplating development than any other operator - his website - www.hoksve.com.

Four Development Case Studies followed.

Hugh Oliver-Bellasis, RAS of England showed his elegant plan for a national facility to promote the Society's 'Science into Practice' motivation. He was very open in his explanation of challenges his organisation has faced, enabling his colleagues in the industry to avoid possible future pitfalls. He has had a small amount of state support for his efforts.

John Rothwell, RAS of South Australia said his Adelaide showground was within city limits but had successfully resisted efforts to relocate them, to significant advantage. They had superb access and public transport links, the Government had supported redevelopment to a great extent. A key theme running through this completed development was renewable energy and green resource management, enabling the centre to attract many more high calibre events, who are looking to promote their own corporate green credentials – a strong message for all who are considering the design of future facilities.

Jonathon Tunny, RAS of Queensland (the EKKA). Another showground within city limits which has resisted attempts to relocate, ensuring good visitor numbers for the future. Superb access and funding from 'enabling development' which was easy to achieve owing to its proximity to the city has again produced a facility of world-class quality.

Ray Jones, RHAS of Scotland. Their showground has an unusual challenge provided by a compulsory purchase order issued by the neighbouring airport, which has historically provided valuable income for overflow car-parking. Ray and his team have produced a relocation plan to provide a fantastic new facility for Scotland, much welcomed by the now devolved Government. Disappointingly the airport have now delayed their plans to purchase the original showground until up to 2020, leaving the Royal Highland Society in limbo until further events unfold.

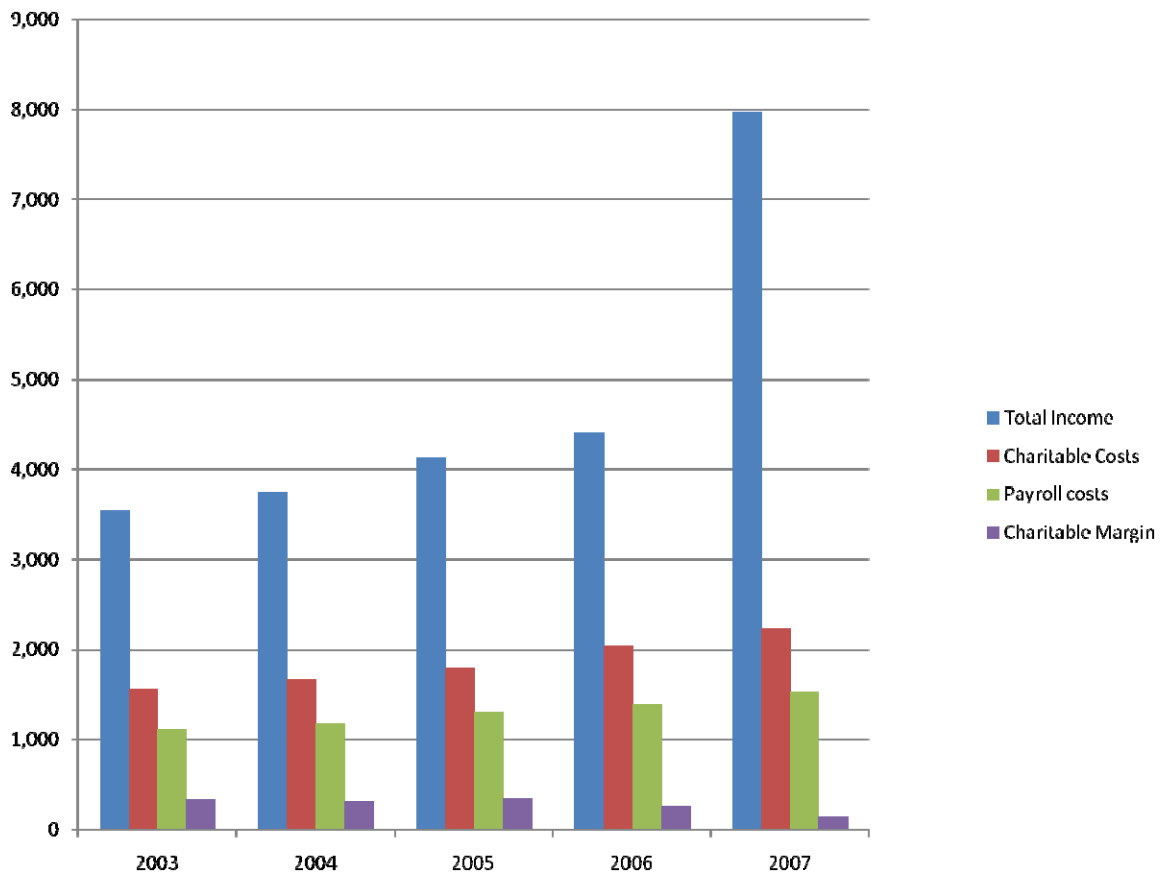
A series of very professional presentations full of hints and tips which will help many societies to achieve a complete facilities makeover without some of the pain experienced by the pioneering societies listed above.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICERS' SEMINAR CONTINUED...

B. FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

A very limited survey of the financial performance of Societies willing to share their results was conducted in advance of the conference. The key message from the following graph is that direct costs are rising faster than income (in UK particularly due to regulatory burdens), and as a consequence the amounts of money available to spend on the furtherance of agriculture are falling.

This underlines the need for redevelopment projects to provide alternative forms of income, and for Societies to understand business mechanisms which can reverse these trends – hence sections A and C of the seminar.



An important outcome of this section was to persuade more Societies of the value of financial benchmarking, and a firm offer from Jim Tucker of the IAFE to conduct a more technical exercise to highlight world wide trends.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICERS' SEMINAR CONTINUED...

C. STAFF EXCHANGES

One opportunity arising from the RASC community is using staff exchanges as a training opportunity. One or two notable examples have happened on an ad hoc basis. A discussion took place on how to formalise this process to allow more members of staff to benefit from looking outside their own organisations, led by John Purling, Royal Norfolk Agricultural Association. A small group would meet to take the formalisation of staff exchange programmes forward.

During this session we heard details of the Marshall Papworth Scholarship Trust from Steve Harris, East of England Agricultural Society, which provides funding for graduates from developing countries to study aspects of agriculture and rural structure in UK universities, returning home to make a greater impact. A full paper on this was given at the conference.

D. ZIMBABWE FARMERS' TRUST

Mr Terry Strachan, CEO, Royal Agricultural Society of Natal, presented a brief report on the activities of the ZFT, a non-political organization, in the hope that RASC Member Societies may be able to assist.

Established in 2000 to give support to Zimbabwe farmers who had lost their farms and were virtually destitute, the Trust receives no government support but close liaison is maintained with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London.

Several hundred cases have so far been dealt with promptly to the benefit of deserving farmers but the ZFT needs to seek out other Zimbabwe farmers who need help to avoid further misery and poverty.

There is great value in encouraging ex-Zimbabwe farmers to remain in Africa and assist in imparting knowledge and further agricultural expansion. At the current time opportunities exist in Zambia and Mozambique and the Trust undertakes to facilitate in this respect.

Terry asked that if CEOs were in a position to assist with the names of deserving cases, it would really be appreciated if these could be shared with the ZFT.

Contact details are:

**George Campbell-Johnson,
Heronswood House,
Berwick St. James,
Salisbury,
Wilshire,
SP3 4TX UK**

Tel: 0044 (0)1722 790325

Fax: 0044 (0)1722 790790.

Email - zimfarmtrust@tiscali.co.uk.

REPORT OF NEXT GENERATION (NG) FORUM FORUM LEADER: GREG HARRIS (RASNZ)

Greg welcomed the 53 delegates from 9 countries then introduced Billy Yarr, Philip Bolam and Malcolm Stansfield who spoke briefly about aspects of RASC, the Commonwealth and the conference theme.

Presentations by NGs followed:

Leona Dargis (Canada) spoke of coping with adversity through positive thinking.

Leona described how she and her four sisters had coped with the loss of their farming parents last year and how through hard work, they continued to manage the family farm.

Alison McIntosh and Tim Robinson (Australia)

Alison and Tim both past rural achievers, explained the elements of the competition set up by the Australian show societies. They described how the societies attracted and encouraged young people to get involved in the show movement with examples of stock judging, show girl and various other competitions.

Michael Dom (Papua New Guinea)

Michael outlined in some detail his pig feeding research work based on sweet potato silage. Traditionally the mature sweet potato is fed to pigs but it is a very lengthy and laborious process. Silage of both root and vine is easily made and can be stored up to 9 months. The results were very promising. If successful this silage process would be welcomed because both pig keeping and sweet potato farming are economically important activities for the smaller farmer in Papua New Guinea.

Kenny Eng (Singapore)

Kenny represented the Kranji Countryside Association, one of RASC's newest members. He gave an insight into life in Singapore and his family business which has grown from a 2 acre nursery into an innovative gardening business with which he intends to revolutionise the gardening and landscape industry in Singapore.

Charles Reynolds (England)

Charles explained the Marshall Papworth Scholarship Trust now in its 4th year which offers graduates in developing countries the opportunity to study subjects relating to agriculture in UK universities. The objective is to increase their scope and effectiveness in their work amongst their rural communities. The Trustees of the MPS are considering offering a less academically qualified and more practically inclined year's study at an agricultural college for students from developing countries which would increase effectiveness in their field of work.

Inspirational speaker, Dick Taylor, New Zealand, then joined the Forum:

Dick told his remarkable story of determination which held everyone's attention, an inspiration to NGs. Dick enjoyed running and determined to succeed in that sport, so began training seriously, ultimately running 400 miles a week. He achieved his goal winning the Gold Medal in the 10,000 metres at the Christchurch Commonwealth Games in 1974, only to be struck down with arthritis months later. A shining example that hard work, determination and ambition can achieve great things.

The NGs followed this session with a round table discussion. The subjects discussed were:

- What do you look for when coming to a conference?
- How do you suggest we best utilise the time available?
- How can we spread the word of conference and attendance and the benefit of attendance?
- How do we convey the lessons learned at this conference to those back home and put it into practice?
- What ideas do you have that will make future conferences better?

NEXT GENERATION PROGRAMME IN SUMMARY...

The NGs felt that the programme as presented here was what was needed and that networking and time for social interaction was essential.

Spreading the word should be via show councils, YFC, 4H and Rural Youth and Facebook with this linked to the RASC web site.
(www.commagshow.org)

There is an acknowledged need for sponsors to see the benefit of attendance with reports and involvement with the show society.

Suggestions for future conferences included a poster session , a debrief after conference and a repeat NG forum at the end of conference.

The morning concluded with a presentation given by John Bennett on the proposed “understanding and assistance” mission to Papua new Guinea in November 2009. Details of this self funded trip will be available early in 2009 from John Bennett.

Continued communication by attendees between conferences is essential.

THE CHIEF EXECUTIVES OFFICERS' CHALLENGE TO THE NEXT GENERATION

The Next Generation group joined the Chief Executives for the afternoon session. Split into groups of about EIGHT they were each joined by two CEOs who led (not managed!) the discussion. They debated how the next generation of Society leaders would deal with the current business challenge presented by the graph resulting from financial benchmarking in section B.

After an initial sharp intake of breath, lively discussions ensued.

Because of the large numbers in the Next Generation Forum, youth leaders from three tables were chosen at random to outline their discussions. All gave good accounts of the debates, despite the shock of having to perform without warning (good training for later life!). They were:

- Louis Fell (UK)
- Kenny Eng (Singapore)
- David Thompson (New Zealand)

There were many suggestions but recurring themes were:

1. To find different sources of income to support the agricultural activity.
2. To encourage visitor numbers by innovation – adding 'unique events' to mature shows to increase their appeal to a wider audience.
3. To ensure all Societies were using professional support from the worlds of finance, law, business and marketing.
4. To study demographics and by understanding this subject changing to suit the market. People (volunteers) are the biggest single asset, and we should all make sure we are using the asset to its maximum opportunity.

REPORT ON BREAKOUT SESSIONS

What Role Will Livestock Play In Future Royal Shows?

Chair: Terry Strachan
(RAS Natal)

The presence of livestock is under threat, but without them the show becomes meaningless. Prize money, even if increased is not sufficient inducement, though subsidising entries, especially help with fuel costs would certainly assist

The onus is on societies selling the benefits to exhibitors through education and marketing. They should inform them and potential exhibitors that the primary object is to bench mark against others and there is prestige and acknowledgement attached to performing well especially if media are present. The services of respected judges (sourced from around the world) can be sought to advise and assist as well as judge. Many felt that that sales during and after the show should be encouraged. A marketing opportunity

Societies are keen to attract more urban visitors to their shows, livestock are always of interest and provide the feeling that the show is about farming. Youth must also be enthused, so from school to college/university level they should be encouraged to take an interest.

All were agreed that production, NOT cosmetics, should rule the day. To this end societies should actively encourage the participation of commercial and non pure-bred animals to complement stud stock. They should also encourage new livestock species such as llamas, alpacas, goats, sheep dogs etc. In addition societies should seek to provide a pleasing and friendly environment which also encourages networking and socialising with fellow breeders, potential customers and like minded people.

Maximising Society Resources during the Year

Chair: John Purling
(Royal Norfolk Association)

Their discussions led them to produce a series of headings on resources to examine to how best to use them.

- Property-land, buildings, plant and equipment;
- Environmental – should you consider - generating your own energy?
- Water recovery
- People – paid and volunteers
- Membership, should we be enhancing the package to attract more members ?
- Human Resources, how best to use them including youth/NGs/YFC
- Opportunities to work with other societies
- Exchange best practice – staff – programmes
- Finance- are there any grants, possibility of legacies, any government funding— a dedicated person to negotiate with the essential departments.
- Fund Raising – Parties, Dinners/ Suppers
- Example—Royal Welsh. Wales is composed of several counties. Each take it in turn to act as host county. Each year they raise money for a specific feature/building on the showground.
- Know your business – S.W.O.T Analysis.
- Marketing – Selecting the right media/ timing
- Public Relations – Getting to the right audience
- Catering commissions
- Trade stands, livestock - fees
- Intellectual Property – VALUE YOUR BRAND

In Summary – 3 types of people:

1. Those who make it happen.
2. Those who watch it happen.
3. Those who wonder what's happened.

PRE CONFERENCE TOUR REPORT

76 delegates gathered in Auckland for the North Island tour. This was an excellent educational tour.

LIMESTONE DOWNS STATION

This all grass 3129ha farm owned by the Alma Baker Trust is stocked with 13,000 Romney x Dorset ewes and 4000 ewe hoggs, 140% lambing, in addition 3,500 cattle both steers and bulls, bought as calves, bulls sold finished at 18 months, steers at 2 1/2 yrs. The land is very hilly so there's no cropping and no supplementary feed. Their policy is one of flexible stocking and a strategic use of nitrogen.

The Trust is very unusual. It's dedicated to developing agriculture in the following ways :

- Investing in young people from aspiring scientists to young farmers.
- Playing a role in teaching, research and extension which incidentally benefits those with similar farming systems
- Taking a great interest in environmental issues in line with the Founder's wishes.
- The Trust has invested NZ\$5 million since 1981 mainly out of profit.
- Gave a paper at the conference and has had long association with RASC.

CAMBRIDGE STUD

It was a privilege to visit this stud, owned by Sir Patrick & Lady Hogan, which has been the number one nursery for thoroughbred champions in Australasia for 30 years. Sir Tristram was the stud's famous stallion, became champion stallion of Australia and New Zealand a record nine times and the world's leading sire of Group One winners. Leading vendor at NZ Bloodstock National Yearling Sales for 26 years. Has been top priced lot at Sidney Easter Yearling Sales several times.

BELLVUE DAIRY FARM

Ian & Heather Bell farm 270 ha with 70 ha forestry plantation with a 60" annual rainfall, milking 990 NZ Friesian cows through a 60 bale rotary platform. With a stocking rate of 3.66/ha, 75% spring and 25% autumn calving the total production is 500,000 kg milk solids/ha/yr. Feeding is mainly from pasture with some sup-

plements. They aim for 500kg milk solids / cow which is approximately 1800 m.s. per ha. The dry cows are wintered on other farms. The farm is split into about 100 paddocks of 2.5 - 3ha each with 60ha closed up for silage

KAIRURU POLLED HEREFORD STUD

Dedicated pedigree stock farmers, Kevin & Jane McDonald have 180ha, really a large volcanic hill rising to 1500 feet with fertile lower land, free draining volcanic ash. There are 100 stud cows and 30 bulls aged 2 yrs. Bulls from this stud are sort after with high prices. Semen is exported to Australia, USA, Europe and Canada.

The farm also carries 100 Hereford Friesian calves, 100 Hereford cross Friesian 18 month steers and 100 cross steers of 21/2 yrs. They pay a premium for 4 day old calves sired by pedigree Hereford bulls because they grow faster.

KITENUI DEER FARM

Mr Matischka is a pioneer in New Zealand deer farming. Bought in 1969 the 182 Ha holding lies at 1600 feet. Five hand reared fawns and a stag formed the basis of the herd which produced a stag "Major" which became well known since it went from a 15 point two yr. old to a 27 point nine yr old. The breeding line is still maintained.

There are Sika deer (Japan), fallow deer (England), Rusa deer (Sumatra), Thar-a goat type from the Himalaya.

Velvet antlers are removed while soft and full of blood, with little discomfort, sold as aphrodisiac and medical. Currently 4kg velvet worth NZ\$100 kg. At 7stags per ha = \$2800/ha.

We were also given a demonstration of aerial fertiliser distribution.

Continued ...

PRE CONFERENCE TOUR CONTINUED...

RISSINGTON BREEDLINES

Another stimulating visit and conference paper. A company developed over four generations, now with global influence developing genetically superior sheep and cattle breeds and reliable supply chains for the farming and food industries. Based in a country well known for its innovative pastoral farming, they have developed their own specific breeding programmes. The breeding company is completely separate from a substantial beef and sheep operation, but no doubt the latter acts as a test bench.

They have the world's largest sheep progeny testing programme, measuring 10,000 animals annually, cumulating a million records in total. For 15 years they have also been based in the University of Nebraska where they produced their stabiliser strain.

SILENA WINERY, HASTINGS

Situated on latitude 39, south facing on river gravel soil it is a relatively new vineyard but with a very experienced wine maker, who has taken it into the top class producing Merlot and Semillon, with a higher vineyard on gravel soils they produce Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. They crush 1500 tons of fruit.

In NZ the area of wine grapes increased by 71% from 17,300 ha in 2002 to 29,620 ha five years later. Marlborough is the largest area with 17,170 ha, next Hawke's Bay with 4,930 ha.

PERNEL ORCHARD

The Mardon family started producing apples 60 years ago, now specialise in top fruit from their 33ha orchard for the export market, Royal Gala, Braeburn, Fuji and Granny Smith. A third of the orchard is planted with stone fruit, peaches, apricots, nectarines and plums. They produce 85 varieties of fruit which provides an extensive harvesting season and make a feature of using the Integrated Fruit Production.

Programme which reduces the use of broad spectrum chemicals still allowing high quality fruit.

STRAHAN SHEEP AND BEEF FINISHING PROPERTY

Sam & Rosie Strahan together with Ian & Stephanie Strahan farm 500 ha, finishing 14,000 lambs during autumn and winter, then 1050 steers during the spring and summer. This is a farming business so they are recording live weight gains and pasture growth to match the two with flexibility in stock numbers, stressing minimal cost. In addition they grow 35ha peas and 60ha cereals. The farm has been used as a Monitor by Meat and Wool New Zealand.

THE ROYAL SHOW, CHRISTCHURCH

The final visit of the Pre-Conference Farm Tour. The RAS of NZ is an umbrella organisation for 100 local shows nationwide and the 65 breed societies. With no permanent showground, the Royal Show moves on a circuit hosted by several show societies. Currently they are spending 4 consecutive years hosted by the Canterbury Agricultural and Pastoral Association which incidentally was created in 1862.

This is a very lively three-day show, very much a family event where one day is called the "Family Day". Christchurch decants to the Show, an affinity between town and country. There is an emphasis on education and the main ring has a mixture of judging and entertainment together with a good range of retail stalls, agricultural machinery and a village green where families gather.

One highlight is the Ambassador of the Year Award initiated by the Canterbury Association. It is awarded to the person who has shown continued loyalty and contribution to the A & P movement over a number of years and has the potential to benefit the association as a result of winning the award.

The 2008 winner, Jeanette Brown, had competed and exhibited in equestrian events since 1952, a Life Member since 1974, established the Ataahua Pony Stud that year, which had competed every year since. She had acted as steward and judge and continues to pass on her invaluable knowledge and enthusiasm to young riders and provided ponies for numerous riders to further their interest in the A & P movement.

POST CONFERENCE TOUR REPORT

65 DELEGATES TOOK PART IN WHAT WAS A MOST INFORMATIVE AND IN SCENIC TERMS, AN UNFORGETTABLE TOUR OF THE SOUTH ISLAND.

BEITH FARM, METHVEN

A former traditional fine arable farm on the Canterbury Plains like many others has been converted to large scale dairying. Craig and Helen Elliot and Graham Robertson own the 1050ha property and now milk 4600 cows, pure Friesians, pure Jerseys and Friesian/Jersey cross, raising 1000 heifer calves. The land is all irrigated using centre pivots.

Output is impressive, producing 1714 kgs milk solids/ha from their spring calving herd. This measure of output is also a benchmark in valuing property. A slightly worrying aspect is the obvious level of debt carried in building up such an enterprise. The Elliots input in terms of commitment is staggering; their next aim is to buy out the other 50% of the property. This is a prime example of where NZ agriculture is going.

AKAUNUI FARM

Ian and Diana Mackenzie farm 420ha of intensive arable land close to Ashburton on the Canterbury Plains, growing milling wheat, triticale, grass seed, and some vegetable seeds aimed at the Far East market. They also fatten several thousand lambs. Output is impressive given that irrigation is used. Their son runs an agricultural contracting business concentrating on combine harvesting. We got an insight from Ian into the "politics" of local agriculture. Diana has created a beautiful 12 ha garden amongst a great stand of mature trees.

The tour continued through Geraldine into the Mackenzie Country, named after the Scottish sheep stealer who moved sheep through a secret route from the plains up into the high country. Lovely country which stood out beautifully. At Lake Tekapo airfield 30 delegates opted to fly round the summit of Mount Cook..

HIGH COUNTRY SALMON, TWIZEL

Richard and Margaret Logan have built up this business in waters that are part of the hydro-electric waterway system in the area.

The water is pure and unpolluted, an ideal environment for raising their Chinook (King) salmon, producing 70 tonnes annually, all sold on site to passing trade on the main road. A most impressive and interesting operation.

The tour continued through the high country seeing previously scrub land, now transformed into intensive dairying with plentiful irrigation, including probably the longest centre pivots in the world, at over 1km in length.

WHITESTONE CHEESE, OAMARU.

This cheese company was formed in the 1980s by Bob Berry as a diversification project when the bottom fell out of farming. From small beginnings, he now has 60 staff producing award winning cheeses. Head cheese maker is Jason Tarrant who has established himself as one of New Zealand's leading specialist cheese makers. His ability is reflected in the number of medals and awards achieved. Windsor Blue is the flagship, with soft whites, feta and sheep's milk cheese not far behind. All milk is locally sourced through Fonterra; Bob rightly claims that the natural environment is one of their greatest assets.

Continued .../

POST CONFERENCE TOUR CONTINUED...

TOTARA ESTATE

The bold vision started here in 1882, the dream of sending frozen meat to the other side of the world. The estate is a unique part of New Zealand's history where the story of the development of the meat industry is told, when it was part of a great 15,000 acre property. To-day there are restored farm buildings and displays which are a tribute to the courage and determination of early pioneers, with museum displays, the original slaughter house, stables, archaeological remains and some of the early sheep breeds, and some great characters acting out the parts played in the 1880s!

MOUNT LINTON

is 12000 ha of highly productive farmland, one of the largest privately owned stations in New Zealand, which has stood at the forefront of their agricultural industry for more than 100 years. Two families, the McGregors and Mullalys, have been involved throughout with another family recently buying in. The Welsh general manager Ceri Lewis explained the key advantages of Mount Linton are size and determination to be a leader in genetics. With 55,000 ewes and 24,000 ewe hoggets, 2000 beef cows and 890 calving AA female it has the scale and livestock numbers to maximise selection pressure.

The breeding programs for both cattle and sheep are focused on selecting animals that can perform in this difficult climate and commercially run operation. The performance criteria to select animals are based on common industry processes and values. The Genetics unit is a separately run farm that breeds the terminal sire Suftex and Texel sheep for the Station. The Texel influence was established in 1990 and has become a major feature of the Station's ewe flock performance due to its excellent terminal and maternal traits.

A proportion of the Texel flock is centred solely on producing terminal sires and the balance is selected for performance in maternal traits in the flocks on the unit.

Finishing cattle provide a complimentary role to the sheep and are destined to Five Star Beef and quality Japanese markets. Wool amounts to 12% of income. We were joined by Fraser Fletcher and Bridget McKenzie, local managers for ASB Bank, who described local conditions and circumstances.

A SIGHT SEEING DAY

Delegates visited Milford Sound or Doubtful Sound. Milford is spectacular with towering mountains and copious wildlife; Doubtful, whilst much larger, is more of a wilderness again with mountainous terrain and part of the Manapour hydro scheme which supplies the electricity to the Bluff aluminium smelter near Invercargill

GIBBSTON VALLEY WINERY

This winery in the Central Otago region produces some exceptional wines, with vineyards on more traditional rocky slopes. They have built a reputation for high quality Pinot Noir. Delegates enjoyed a guided tour of the vineyard, descriptions of the wine making process and a tasting in the underground cellar, kept at constant 14 degrees C.

LAKE HAWEA STATION

There were some exceptional visits during the pre and post conference tours, including Limestone Downs and Mount Linton. This visit was entirely different, equally impressive. An important high country station, farmed since 1912 by the Rowley family. 11,000ha stocked with 10,500 merino sheep and 150 Hereford and Hereford x Angus cows kept on an irrigated lake side plot of 200ha. Merino wool, sold at good prices for a top quality product, is a major source of income. Tom Rowley is an accomplished wool grader. The majority of the land is so steep it can only be gathered on foot with dogs.

Our grateful thanks to the organisers and the host farmers for such an imaginative series of farm visits coupled with that magnificent New Zealand scenery.

NEXT GENERATION – POST CONFERENCE TOUR

14 enthusiastic RASC Next Generation delegates, set off to explore New Zealand Agriculture, New Zealand culture and the beautiful sights.

A report by NG Delegate Alison McIntosh...

“The team led by passionate local Greg Harris, made the entire trip so informative, with a perfect balance between agricultural understanding and learning and the opportunity to see the beauty and wonder of New Zealand and what their tourism industry has to offer.

We spent 6 days exploring the Marlborough region. Travelling north from Christchurch we drove along the rugged scenic east coast to Kaikoura, easing into the tour with a relaxing afternoon in this tourist village followed by a morning of whale watching before continuing to Blenheim, our base for the rest of the week.

We saw the diversity of New Zealand Agriculture through a broad range of visits, quite an experience. Our learning took in the renowned wine industry, backbone of the Marlborough region, to the high profile export of crayfish and the intriguing science of producing a commodity we take for granted - ‘salt’. We saw it all.

It was particularly rewarding for me to see Greg’s farm, and learn how ‘one of us’ is doing business in the world of Agriculture. Greg and his family have several enterprises including an Angus herd of cattle, building up to market bulls to local producers, a Corriedale flock again producing rams for local clientele and of course the vineyard, where we learned that it was this which provided the sustainability for the farm to go on in its current capacity.

This has been the scenario for many farmers in the Marlborough region, made evident by seeing the sheer volume of vineyards.

I was impressed with the salt works, where we learnt of climatic and other challenges in this industry as well as the intriguing process from start to the end product of table salt. I enjoyed the lavender farm, good to see a producer taking their commodity from its raw state into saleable value added for a variety of market niches.

So encouraging to see producers looking beyond the farm gate, a great example for other producers to follow.

Now, if you don’t mind a drop of wine, can we (the Next Generation) encourage you next time you need a good bottle of Sauvignon Blanc to try New Zealand’s Oyster Bay. Greg’s family business provides grapes to Oyster Bay. We were fortunate to have a tour through the wine making facility and learn about the science behind making quality wine. Great to see the success of this product from farm gate to consumer.

In addition to the itinerary it was extremely valuable to have the continued opportunity to spend time with, network and learn from our NG friends after the official conference. I feel this has built up our connections to ensure the RASC NG group will go from strength to strength.”

Grateful thanks are extended to Greg Harris, and the wonderful New Zealand Hospitality.



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