



Conference Reports:

Report on the 60th New Zealand Grassland Annual Conference Held at Nelson, NZ, October 20-22 1998 Theme: 'Nelson - a Pastoral Palette'

Haydn Lloyd Davies

President, NSW Grassland Society

This was a very well organised and tightly run conference which I found most stimulating. I urge the NSW Grassland Society to ensure if possible that we are always represented at the New Zealand Conference.

Nelson is at the northern end of the South Island and the agriculture is very intensive - e.g. a year round stocking rate of 3 cows per hectare on a nil-endophyte pasture in the district. I benefited from a paper given in the first session by a farm consultant, Dick Bennison, 'An introduction to the region', where he mentioned the environment and all the Agricultural industries in the region. Also in the conference opening, Alan Stewart emphasised the following features of the New Zealand grassland philosophy:

- Legume based pastures are the basis of our agriculture (I could not agree more)
- Upgrade the soil fertility without the use of nitrogenous fertiliser.
- Control grazing management (this did not involve one particular grazing method, but rather appropriate grazing management for the particular circumstance)
- Ensure biologically active soil.
- Ensure that the systems are sustainable (where have we heard that term before?)

He later went on to emphasise the importance of reliable research funding for pasture research. There was also a need to maintain continuous selection for improved pasture plants.

Field trips are an important part of a Grassland Conference and give participants an opportunity to discuss any difficulties which might have arisen on the practices being demonstrated. There were two afternoons allocated to field trips. I would have preferred only one field trip afternoon in a 2.5 day conference. I will not cover all the field trips but just mention some that I found particularly interesting. The first farm visited was a 360 ha property with 80 ha run-off giving 250 ha effective land for dairying. They ran 620 cows, reared 165 calves, some bulls and young steers, produced 758 kg of milk solids per hectare and purchased no

supplements. The owners, Phillip and Jocelyn Riley, reckoned they had more potential to come!

We visited a sheep, beef and deer enterprise run by Norman and Ian Parker who farmed a mixture of flats, hills and steep hills. They were applying 160 kg per hectare of MAP/super/sulphur mix and 65 kg of urea. The perception I had was that soils in the area all had high P levels and there was increasing emphasis on responses to lime, sulphur and potassium. The pasture species sown were ryegrass, cocksfoot, timothy, white and red clover and chicory.

One very interesting visit was to a young Dutch-born farmer Tom Crooyman who carried 125 cows on 30 hectares. He obviously had a heavy fertiliser programme. He applied 500 kg/ha of 50% potash/super and 100 kg/ha of nitrogen (25 kg per application).

A feature of the Conference which interested me was the Grassland Memorial Trust Awards. There were several awards including the winner of the pasture competition which was based on records for the whole farm. We might discuss this for our pasture competition. People who had given committed service to the Society and/or pastures in general were recognised and honoured. There were also prizes for the best paper, best poster and best junior contributor.

It would take a report almost the length of the proceedings to cover the many interesting topics discussed at the conference. Some of the issues we may hear about in the future were: Chemical-free hill country sheep and beef production (two problems which arose were parasitism in young stock and weeds); Caucasian clover (a whole session was devoted to this legume); forages with condensed tannins - these are legumes with a high tannin content (e.g. Lotus, which is bloat safe. However, its nutritive value does not seem to be as high as white or red clover).

The poster session had a feature which we have already used in Queanbeyan and will be using again, namely that each poster presenter will present his topic briefly to a plenary session. The poster session took place from 10.20 until noon and

covered a wide range of topics from rhizobium to farmer attitudes towards riparian management practices.

There was one very well organised breakfast session, 'The Internet and its benefits to farmers'. Breakfast sessions are a feature of many US conferences - they are no problem to an ageing insomniac like me but I wonder how the younger members would react!

There were two features of the Conference which in my opinion detracted from its value. Firstly, and most important, there were no proceedings available at the time of the conference. The value of presentations is greatly enhanced when you

can refer to the text. Secondly, there were two concurrent sessions. I was interested in each of the topics and two sessions would have easily replaced the second field trip.

Apart from these two issues, I cannot praise too highly the very efficient organisation, the disciplined timing and the interesting and wide ranging programme at the New Zealand Conference. Thank you very much New Zealand Grassland Society for inviting the NSW Society to send a delegate. I also wish to thank the NSW Society for supporting my visit to the New Zealand Conference. I consider the reciprocal visits to be of great value to both Societies and should be encouraged.