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# Grassland News

"Fuelled by science and tempered by experience"

NEW ZEALAND GRASSLAND ASSOCIATION INC

## View from the Coast

Anders Crofoot

**Greetings from the coast** It has been busy on farm regrassing. We have sown 13ha of annual ryegrass, 42ha of permanent ryegrass and 12ha of rape (which will go into lucerne in the spring). Two days after drilling was completed we had three inches of rain and some more after that. The grass is striking well, but now we are having issues with Canada Geese, which have an uncanny ability to find new grass.

In looking at the regrassing programme it is rewarding to see how much has been influenced by people involved with NZGA. All our permanent ryegrass has the AR1 endophyte. This endophyte has been a great advance for us in reducing ryegrass staggers. We also have two paddocks of AR37 which we are not as happy with, as we continue have issues with sheep getting staggers from the epoxyanthitremes. We started working with lucerne seven years ago, looking for a plant that would be more productive on our dry sandstone coastal terraces. We are currently exploring

how we might use different clovers on our hills. Derrick Moot is encouraging a trial of gland clover (he isn't totally one eyed about lucerne).

With things gearing up for the Pasture Persistence Symposium in Hamilton, 10-11 May, and a recent Executive meeting selecting papers for Gisborne, 8-10 November, I've been looking through a fair bit of new research. There is certainly some excellent work going on, but I must say, the increase in the number of papers on modelling and social research is a bit disappointing. From a farmer's point of view they don't add value to our business. With all the upheavals in funding processes in the past decade (or more) I'm not so sure the right research is getting done. Yes, it fits funding timetables and budgets, but is it making farmers more productive? From Jacqueline's article elsewhere in this newsletter our industry is doing better than most of NZ, but is that really good enough?

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### Subscription reminder

Currently there are too many members with overdue subs. Please check your membership is up to date. To operate effectively the Association relies on this funding and arrears put pressure on members willing to pay on time. Remember that to receive membership discount at conference subs must be paid.

## What's Coming Up



### Hamilton May 10 -11

Registration details and programme available on the website or from the Executive Officer at [eo@grassland.org.nz](mailto:eo@grassland.org.nz); ph 03 477 0712

### Gisborne Nov 8-10

We introduce this year's conference by revisiting the first conference in Gisborne in 1983.



## The issue of pasture persistence – May 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>

A call to arms to help solve farmers' pasture persistence problems will start with the two-day "Pasture Persistence Symposium" run by the NZ Grassland Association in May in Hamilton.

Pasture persistence is one of the major issues confronting dairy and sheep and beef farmers throughout New Zealand. "There has always been a degree of dissatisfaction with the persistence of ryegrass pastures, but the issues have grown with the intensification of farm systems over the past decades", says Graham Kerr of the organising committee.

Bringing together some of New Zealand's top pastoral scientists, along with farmers, consultants and agribusiness technical experts to discuss issues, the Symposium

will combine sessions on pasture management, insect challenges, the effect of climate and changing farm systems, with sessions on the variety of plant species and the best ways to establish them and ensure their persistence.

Graham encourages people to attend, saying it will be a technical forum intent on uncovering problems and drawing conclusions and information to help farmers achieve better outcomes, with longer pasture persistence.

We also hope that, as well as highlighting persistence issues, the symposium will lead to a programme taking the knowledge from it out to farmers to help in their farming system, Kerr says.

## NZ Grassland Trust Farming award winners

At each conference the NZGT recognise two farming enterprises nominated from within the region for excellence in grassland farming.

The major requirements sought include:

- Good grassland farming - an impressive, profitable grassland-based business, run for at least five years on the property.
- Innovative approach - using the latest grassland technology effectively.
- Sustainable management - a good degree of sustainability in the enterprise and a strong responsibility for environmental matters.
- Communication skills - passing on good grassland farming skills to others in the region, and including local community activity.

Each winner receives five years' subscription to the NZ Grassland Association as part of the award.

### The 2010 Farmer winners

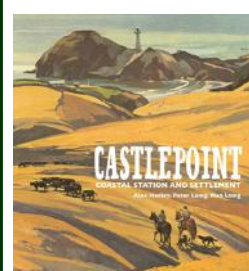
**Grant Ludemann:** Winslow farm is a 200ha intensive lamb finishing property 100km south of Christchurch. The property is part of the EGL pastoral group and is integrated with 4 other sheep breeding and finishing properties and a dairy farm. Ewes from other properties in

the group arrive at Winslow farm from the point of lambing, additional ewes with lambs at foot are purchased early in the season while later in the season the focus is on purchase of weaned lambs for finishing. This is a dynamic and fast moving business which finishes up to 35,000 lambs each year.

**Craige and Roz Mackenzie** operate two farms in Mid Canterbury, overlooked by the Southern Alps. The 330ha centre pivot irrigated dairy farm milks 1150 cows through a fully automated farm dairy and is supported by a 200ha irrigated arable farm. In addition to providing dairy grazing through-out winter this farm grows a wide range of crops including wheat, vegetable seeds and ryegrass seed. Craige's approach on both operations is detailed monitoring and observation leading to precision application of water, nutrients and pesticides with the aim of reducing the environmental impact. The Mackenzie's have recently launched Agri-Optics, a precision agricultural company offering a range of products and services for the benefit of both farmers and the agricultural sector as a whole.



David Stevens and Grant Ludemann



Recently a book has been published that has strong ties to NZGA, about an iconic property in the Wairarapa, home to our current President and his wife Emily, both of whom many will have met at past conferences. Even if you have not visited Castlepoint, you recognise photographs of the beach's unusual reef, of the lighthouse and of the annual horse races along the beach.

"We realised that unless oral histories were recorded, we'd lose the many and varied personalities that have come and gone through Castlepoint Station," says Anders Crofoot.

'Manufacturing and construction pull down productivity growth' – it's something of a negative title for the latest (25<sup>th</sup> March) release from Statistics New Zealand on the state of New Zealand's development. 'Communications finance and agriculture stars of Multi-factorial productivity growth...' would have given a positive twist and just as much information.

Almost whatever time period since 1978 is considered, these three sectors have grown year-on-year.

Multifactor productivity measures how effectively existing resources (the main components being human and capital) are used to produce goods and services. In the 1978-2009 period, agriculture grew by an average 3.5% per year, finance and insurance by 1.3% and communication services by 5%. In the 2006-2009 period, right through the economic downturn, agriculture grew by an average 0.9% a year, finance and insurance by 1.8% and communication services by 2.8%. In the remaining 12 industries, only cultural and recreational services grew at all (an average of 0.5%); other industries, including construction, retrenched.

Productivity growth is a major factor in standard of living in the long term. It indicates that a nation is able to produce more output from available input over time. Labour productivity is a big part, and in this component communication services grew startlingly between 1978 and 2009 – at 9% average annual increase a year. In second place for growth was agriculture at 4.1%.

When the industry contribution to sector labour productivity growth is measured, however, agriculture contributes twice as much as communication services, and finance and insurance contribute twice as much as agriculture.

But with agriculture there is more to show at the end of the labour... like food to eat.

Labour productivity has been analysed in depth by a research team led by Nicholas Warmke at Statistics New Zealand. As the economy has become more service oriented, productivity growth has slowed. This is because over time it is impossible to reduce the inputs for a given set of inputs. The classic example is that an orchestra requires as many players and musical instruments to play the same music and make the same amount of noise as it did a century ago. Equally, there is a limit to the num-

ber of beds one can make in an hour, or tables one can serve in an evening.

Despite good performance in some sectors, New Zealand's productivity growth does not compare with other developed countries. Theories abound, and certainly geographical isolation and poor investment historically in capital infrastructure, have been cited as part of the problem. Another part could be due to past government emphasis on what would create economic growth in the past. Tourism was one and the creative and performing arts another – two areas where labour productivity stagnates. Of more likely success were the information technology and biotechnology suggestions. Of further importance, both enhance productivity within the agricultural sector, and with appropriate investment, have potential to do more.

Nicholas Warmke's research has shown that investment in ICT capital goods contributes to what is termed 'capital deepening' and so can increase labour productivity. Further, efficient use of ICT can help companies increase their overall efficiency and uptake of innovation.

In New Zealand, computers tend to be most heavily used in the service sector. Potential for application in agriculture and the intersection with science is high, but in agriculture computer access and broadband coverage is still moving only relatively slowly.

And then there is the biotechnology issue, and concerns about what it might mean.

New Zealand already benefits from some biotechnologies such as clonal propagation (calculated to be worth over \$139 million in 2005). The country has the potential to be at the forefront of biotechnological developments addressing challenges, but investment will be required in order to achieve growth, and a rethink allowing the spectrum of biotechnologies to be explored.

OECD reports suggest that in order to boost productivity New Zealand should focus upon infrastructure (particularly energy and telecommunications), human capital (particularly the availability of science and technological skills and of management skills) and innovation (particularly businesses undertaking research and development (R&D)).

The Government has made considerable investment in, and forward plans for, infrastructure during its term. Of



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course it isn't enough to catch up with Australia – but there are only 4.4 million people in New Zealand.

In terms of human capital and the emphasis on science and technology, dropping fees in these areas would boost the apparent national value of the degree to prospective students.

For management skills, more professional development is required, and there are already many providers. Encouraging more in-work people to take up the opportunity of further study should be a no-brainer (and the fact that more people aren't engaging rather makes the

point about poor management).

For the innovation side of things, perhaps it is time to rethink the tax breaks for R&D.

New Zealand is facing huge bills because of the earthquakes. The construction industry is about to boom, and it is now that the country should be rethinking goals and priorities. With the right investment, the next report from Statistics New Zealand will be titled 'Construction and agriculture lead productivity growth'.

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## GISBORNE 1983

From Deric Charlton



Conference opening session at Poho-O-Rawiri Marae— who do you recognise?

**I have only attended one Annual Grassland Conference in Gisborne – back in 1983 – a memorable experience in more than one way.**

This conference was my third as NZGA Secretary so I was in the “front line” plus I presented a paper on clover persistence in hill pastures and co-authored a paper on aerial topdressing, so the week was fully occupied.

In 1983 the NZGA President was John Toxopeus, a soil researcher in the Soil Fertility Group based at Ruakura, and by 1983 he had amassed much experience with lime and other pasture nutrients in trials throughout Waikato. That year he also learned some Maori, as the Conference began in the famous Poho-O-Rawiri Marae on the outskirts of the city and there was an official welcome onto the marae from the elders, with Tox featuring prominently in the response. He didn't let us down!

The Conference was opened by Dr Ian Shearer, then Minister of Science and Technology and for the Environment.

The other guest speaker was Ossie James, who had developed James Aviation Ltd near Hamilton for servicing the country's agricultural aviation industry. The Gis-

borne Conference was held not long before farming subsidies were removed by the incoming Labour Government as part of their effort to balance the books, and aerial topdressing subsequently nosedived, fertiliser being the most costly farm input.

After these guest addresses it was fascinating to hear the Maori perspective of pastoral agriculture for the first time at a conference. Gisborne farmers Doc Wirepa and Bill Christy presented the Maori viewpoint regarding land ownership and the multi-ownership concept. Charlie Rau gave an excellent overview of land use and district planning in the Gisborne area.

After lunch the Conference moved to the more conventional setting of the Sandown Park Hotel where sessions covered fertiliser application techniques, clovers in hill pasture, farming goats and aspects of grazing management. During the spoken sessions I can still remember Phil Rolston delivering his paper on farming goats and sheep in mixed stocking ratios, and telling the meeting “you have to think like a goat when it comes to fencing the block!”

I also recall Gavin Sheath (then an NZGA Executive member and now a Life Member) being taken to task by his MAF Whatawhata OIC, Peter Rattray, for his pronunciation of their work base – “Gavin, this week you've called the place *Whata-whata, Farta-farta, Farta-whata and Whata-farter* – just which one is it?”

The 1983 Conference in Gisborne was a great success and we all came away with good lasting memories, some valuable information and some new contacts, which is what an NZGA Conference is all about .



NZGA secretary Deric Charlton (left) in organising mode