

NZ GRASSLAND ASSOCIATION

Fuelled by Science, Tempered by Experience

GRASSLAND NEWS

www.grassland.org.nz

September 2020

ISSN 1179-4216

NZ GRASSLAND TRUST UPDATE

The uncertainty brought on by Covid 19 resulted in the opportunity to utilise a new platform for the annual Ray Brougham lecture series. The NZ Grassland Trust in conjunction with NZGA and supported by AgResearch presented the first livestream event for both members and a wider audience.

As a result this years recipient, Dr Gavin Sheath, was interviewed by Dr Liz Wedderburn. This livestream is available [here](#) on the NZGA YouTube channel for those that missed it or want to revisit it or share with others. The attendance on line on the day was fantastic and

follow up views have been high.

Thanks go to both Gavin and Liz for a great effort—we know there was a lot of work that went in to making it look easy. Also thanks to the support from Jenna and the AgResearch comms team for their invaluable support.

For those that want to know more about Dr Ray Brougham and his contributions to grassland research there is more information [here](#) or about the [NZ Grassland Trust](#).

RAY BROUGHAM TROPHY INTERVIEW WITH GAVIN SHEATH - 16 JULY 2020

Owing to the time constraints of the format Gavin was unable to answer all the questions. However he kindly offered to follow up so we could then share them with members.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

During the interview there were many questions that could not be tabled and answered. The following is my attempt to briefly answer these questions – note that these answers are my opinion!!



1] Question: So, encouraging inter-disciplinary research is about people and culture? How important is organisational structure?

Answer: Yes, culture of the organisation/group dominates the wish to collaborate. Structure is much less important, but the opportunity for people to easily engage [eg: co-location] is valuable.

2] Question: What is your biggest regret in terms of farmers failing to adopt a new technology or scientific breakthrough when you look back over your career in ag science?

Answer: My regret is not so much about a particular technology, but more about the slowness in change. An example is the slow acceptance of [and action] the need for better environmental care.

3] Question: What period of time do you think was the 'golden time' in NZ Ag. Science and Extension - why was that? And supplementary question; What do we need to do to get back to the 'golden times' of Ag Science and Extension?

Answer: The 1970-1990s were a “golden time” when agriculture was seen as important to NZ economy and communities and consequently, there was adequate investment. I do not think that we will go back to that “golden time”. As indicated in my interview, there is a need for consolidation of research and education capabilities and a strengthening of practice change skills of the people who service/influence farmers.

4] Question: If people and the decisions they make are so important, how is anyone - farmers in particular - going to swallow decisions from anything "AI" based?

Answer: Like currently available decision support tools [eg: Farmax] AI tools should be used to help inform decisions, not make them. We need to own our decisions and must not get robotic.



NZGA for over 80 years

SPONSORED BY AGRESEARCH

5] Question: Gavin, while you were developing the farm systems approach as a way of integrating knowledge into NZ farming enterprises, what was happening elsewhere in the world?

Answer: There were similar systems approaches being used in Queensland [Tropical Crops and Pastures, CSIRO], France [SAD, INRA] and Netherlands [Wageningen University].

6] Question: Gavin the Monitor Farm program did very well with extension - it eventually ran out of puff but it did huge benefit.

Answer: Yes, it ran out of puff, but the principles of farmer to farmer learning and support are continuing in environmental sub-catchment groups and in the deer [Advance Parties].

7] Question: I'm a hopeful environmental researcher, and that will likely mean conducting research on impacts from farming. Is there an interdisciplinary approach we could take to build better relationships with farmers and enact more applicable research?

Answer: My view is that in the future, most of farm systems research and development will need to be conducted on commercial farms. This approach will be very relevant to environmental issues and will involve intensive monitoring and time series analysis.

8] Question: Gavin, you have focused on change at the level of the farm system, can you comment on change at the farm to catchment level?

Answer: The systems approach at a catchment level will be similar to a farm systems level. The boundary of the system will expand and therefore, will include more people and greater variation in objectives and biophysical parameters.

9] Question: Gavin, how well do our current 'models' of research, practice change, etc. meet the aspirations and needs of Maori landowners and Maori agribusiness?

Answer: For some of the larger and more advanced Maori entities, access to research and practice change expertise is occurring. However, for the majority of Maori farming entities that are still in a development phase, the required services are inadequate. As mentioned in the interview, a combination of sincere engagement, practice change skills, husbandry advice and business planning are needed.

10] Comment: We are not arrogant Gavin - we are ahead of the game - there is no arrogance in that. We should not do the whole 'tall poppy' thing.

Answer: My comment on arrogance related to NZ agriculturalists operating overseas and not fully appreciating the context in which they are working. Note Fonterra in China and Farming Systems Uruguay in S America.

11] Question: OK, should we change the word 'Extension' to 'Engagement' and maybe adopt the phrase 'Engaging science with farming practice'?

Answer: Yes, this phrase captures part of the challenge to ensure science is relevant and useful.

12] Question: Today the hill country farms are threatened by carbon afforestation - what lessons could be taken from the Whatawhata Hill Country project about land use for good purpose and right fit food production vs natural capital loss eg: sediment.

Answer: The answer to this question would be very long so I would encourage anyone who is interested to read "Hughes & Quin 2015, Environmental Management 54 :1228-1305". In summary, the long-term monitoring of different catchments has provided results that are different from what was initially predicted/expected.

13] Question: You mentioned near the beginning that a good measure of system change is whether it allows that system to move towards resilience. The traditional ag-science focus has been to consider resilience in terms of economic gains. As we re-think our future direction in NZ agriculture - what should our measures of resilience be?

Answer: We also need to take into consideration the resilience [sustainability] of people and of natural resources.

14] Question: Do you believe that there's any genuine integrated systems research happening, or is it just talked about?

Answer: If you are meaning farm systems then the answer is no. But remember that integrated systems research can happen at a wide range of levels [eg: mitochondria – wet land ecosystems- Covid pandemic].

Comments: Tino pai rawa atu, e rangatira ma; thanks Gavin and Liz.



NZ GRASSLAND TRUST LEVY STUDENT AWARD WINNERS 2020

This NZGT Scholarship commemorates the lifetime efforts of agricultural science pioneer, [Sir E. Bruce Levy](#), in developing and communicating grassland science.

This is an annual scholarship offered by the NZGT, worth \$3000, for two students each from Massey and Lincoln University, embarking on the second year of a Bachelor of Agriculture or Applied Science Degree in the agricultural area.

Congratulations to this years recipients.



Massey University recipients Jessica Gooding and Troy Boshier with Trust Chair John Caradus

Lincoln University Students Tayla Hill (top) and Selby Wilson (bottom) pictured with Trustee Dr Derek Woodfield.



NZGA 82ND VIRTUAL CONFERENCE 2020

Planning is well underway for NZGA's first online mini conference event. Postponing the conference was a challenging decision but at the same time the Executive wanted to offer something to our members in November - in our normal conference timeslot.

The webinars will have a mix of invited and contributed papers as well as a Q and A session. While some will be taster papers for Invercargill 2021 this is also an opportunity to invite key note speakers who would not normally attend our conference.

There will be something for everyone. These will not be long events as Zoom fatigue is a challenge for many of us!

So look out for the programme in the coming weeks as

NZGA Notes

Its that time of year again when we ask for membership renewals. The NZGA appreciates the ongoing support of its members and sponsors. We welcome new members so feel free to promote the Association to others that you think may benefit.

NZGA membership can be paid online [here](#).

we firm up the agenda and be ready to sign up and set aside the time to join us on-line.

AGM NOTICE

The AGM will also be online this year: provisionally this is timetabled for the 18th November but this will be formally advised once the date and time are confirmed.

NZGA links

NZGA Journal Vol 80 and 81 are online [here](#)

The videos of keynote speakers from the Napier conference are online [here](#)