

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

CONSTANT EVOLUTION TO ENSURE A SUCCESSFUL FUTURE

RICHARD GREEN

*Agricom, P.O. Box 351, Ashburton
rbg@agricom.co.nz*

A proud history

As we look forward and plan for the future of the New Zealand Grassland Association (NZGA) you have to be able to reflect on the foundation on which this Association has been built. As we enter our 75th year of existence we can reflect on a very proud history well documented in 1989 by Derek Woodfield and Deric Charlton.

The early years (1931–1947)

In January 1931 the Assistant Director-General of Agriculture called a meeting to discuss the “betterment of research, investigation, demonstration or instruction in grasslands management.” A committee was set up which recommended departments of grass farming advancement and organized the inaugural meeting of the NZGA.

The annual conference program was developed in the early 1930s alternating between Palmerston North and Christchurch until 1937, when the conference began visiting all regions. This decision had a major influence on the Association’s growth and membership retention, particularly of farmers.

The NZGA went into recess from 1940-1946 due to World War II but its members continued to work on grasslands, including construction of temporary grass airfields.

AH Cockayne was NZGA President from 1931-1948. His Presidential Address used to be broadcast on the national radio programme in those days, and in his final Presidential speech in 1947 he commented: “...that there should be the closest possible and intimate relationship of the grassland farmer, the extension worker and the research worker, all working to the same end, the betterment of the New Zealand grassland ...” (Cockayne 1947)

These aims in 1947 remain the aims in 2005, some 58 years later on.

The Middle Ages (1948–1988)

Membership grew rapidly in the post-war period with a major focus on pasture development, top-dressing and management.

Over 800 people attended conferences in the

early 1950s. Between 1958 and 1971, NZGA gradually membership declined, reaching a low point in 1971 of only 400 members.

Day-to-day running of the Association and conferences was carried out by the Department of Agriculture – mostly by Secretary Hazel Foster, and in the mid-1970s administration moved to Palmerston North, to be shared by the then DSIR Grasslands and Massey University’s Agronomy Department. There were huge contributions made by several individuals to the Grassland Association and membership rose rapidly once more to around 1500.

Recent times (1989–2005)

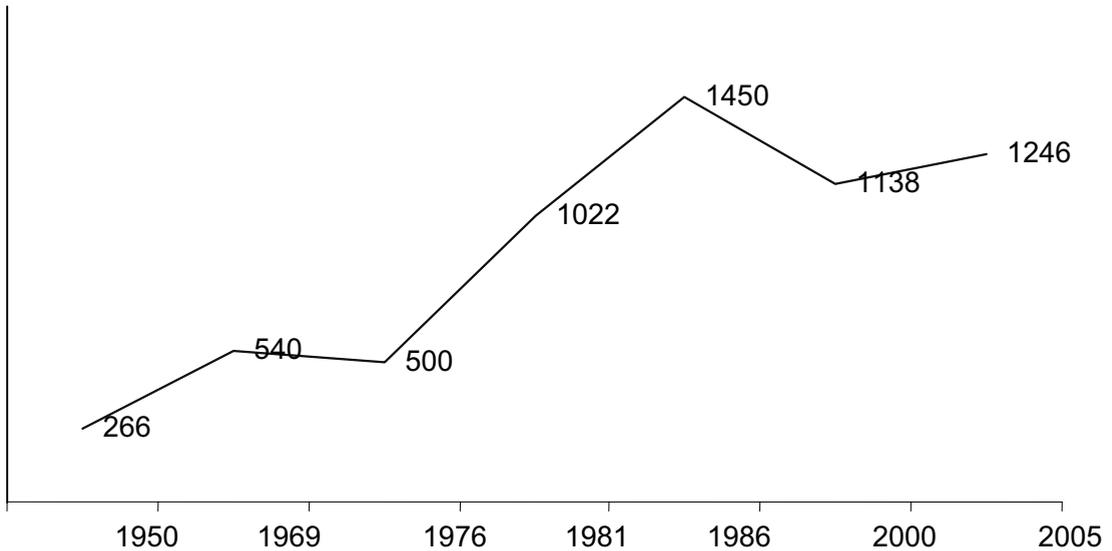
Farming has undergone considerable fluctuations in performance with the complete removal of subsidies in the mid-1980s. Throughout the 1990s, low commodity prices resulted in very poor farming returns. Productivity has lifted considerably since 1990, with lambing percentage increasing by 26%, lamb carcass weight increasing by 20%, wool per head increasing by 10%, and milksolids per cow increasing by 44% since 1975. Commodity prices for sheep meat and dairy products reached record levels in the early-2000s.

Crown Research Institutes were formed in 1992 by merging research divisions of MAF and DSIR, and the emphasis of crown-funded research and development changed from on farm productivity research to biotechnology discovery, environmental and sustainability research.

Under the Commodity Levy Act, the various industries set up their own R&D fund, which has generally been invested in farm systems, data analysis and information generation, extension, industry promotion and training.

During this period of turmoil, in the R&D industry and also in the farming industry, the NZGA has implemented several strategies:

In January 2005, a full time Executive secretary was appointed. This expanded on the half-time position created in December 1999, a move away from reliance on previous support provided from DSIR Grasslands and latterly AgResearch.

Figure 1 NZGA membership.

A website (www.grasslands.org.nz) has been developed in recent years with all past Annual and Special Conference Proceedings converted to an electronic format and available for searching.

A compact disc containing all the NZGA Conference information was developed and now comes with a valuable search engine to help users find particular topics.

An increased emphasis on special symposium conferences run separately from the annual conference, to provide greater depth on key farming issues:

- 1979 Herbage Seed Conference: Producing Herbage Seeds; Using Herbage Cultivars
- 1996 White Clover Symposium
- 1998 Endophyte Symposium
- 2002 Deer Symposium
- 2003 Trees for Fodder Symposium
Dryland Legumes Symposium

A family of ten Level One sponsors has been developed to underpin the Annual Conference. These sponsors have first right of refusal on other sponsorship opportunities within the organisation. A principal sponsorship agreement for the Association has been confirmed with AgResearch.

Association membership declined once more in the early 1990s to around 800. With a refocus on direction this was again raised to 1246 members in 2004 (Figure 1). The total proportion of members, however, has stayed consistent among all the sectors over the last 50 years

(Table 1). Farmers still comprise half of the Association's membership with the balance being split equally between the research and the agribusiness sectors.

The Association continues to be in very good heart. The Annual Conference continues to be the major focus of the NZGA annual activity, still visiting regional centres throughout New Zealand and highlighting key agricultural issues facing each region (Figure 2). Attendances generally exceed 300 except where regional facilities prevent larger attendances. Activities continued to be broadened around the interests of members with special symposia, publications, the website and CD, and regular newsletters.

The people

When you look back at the history of the NZGA the underlying reason for its success has been the contribution of a large number of people with a shared passion for the pastoral industry and the Association's role within the industry. The commitment made by all the previous office bearers and past-presidents listed in Tables 2 and 3 cannot be overstated.

The Local Organising Committee (LOC) is directly responsible for the success of each conference, whether it be the Annual Conference or a special symposium. These local committees, comprising up to ten members, are formed at least a year before the event and undertake the bulk of the planning and activity to make these events successful. However there is no doubt

Table 1 Sector composition of NZGA membership (%).

Year	1950	1969	1976	1981	1986	2000	2005
Farmers	33	46	59	52	50	51	46
Research & University	45*	37*	25	21	25	25	26
Advisory			16	14	11*	0**	0**
Agribusiness	12	16	9	12	9	19	26
Students	0	0	0	0	4	4	0
Others	10	1	1	1	1	1	2
Total no. of members	266	540	500	1022	1450	1138	1246

* Research university and advisory.

** Combined with agribusiness.

Table 2 Past-Presidents of the NZGA.

Year	— Name —	Year	— Name —
1931-1948	A H Cockayne*	1977	W G Thurston
1949	F R Callaghan*	1978	R S Scott
1950	P W Smallfield*	1979	A J Harris
1951	Sir E B Levy*	1980	T E Ludecke**J A Lancashire
1952	R H Bevin	1981	J A Lancashire
1953	A W Hudson*	1982	J A H Inglis
1954	G A Holmes	1983	M R J Toxopeus
1955	J F Filmer	1984	A J Cresswell
1956	J W Calder	1985	G W Sheath
1957	S H Saxby	1986	A C P Chu
1958	L Corkill	1987	J F L Charlton
1959	C E Iverson	1988	M L Smetham
1960	P D Sears	1989	P G Yeoman
1961	J W Woodcock*	1990	R G Duffy
1962	I L Elliot	1991	G J Gould
1963	H Woodyear-Smith	1992	M J Guy
1964	T W Walker	1993	R J M Hay
1965	A T Johns	1994	K H Widdup
1966	A R Dingwall	1995	M B O'Connor
1967	G S Robinson	1996	M G Yorke
1968	J P Lambert	1997	M Manning
1969	R H M Langer	1998	A V Stewart
1970	R W Brougham	1999	B Guy
1971	N A Cullen	2000	T J Fraser
1972	B R Watkin	2001	D R Woodfield
1973	J G H White	2002	D R Woodfield
1974	C Daring	2003	R G M Hurst
1975	G L Banfield	2004	C D Brown
1976	A W Hurst	2005	R B Green

* Founding members.

** Died during presidential term.

that the strategic vision and support provided by the National Executive provides the framework and continuity required to maintain the ongoing success of the annual conferences.

The NZGA secretary's role is critical in keeping the Executive and LOC focused on the key NZGA activities. In 2005 the fact that this position became a full-time, fully-funded role is recognition that volunteers alone are unable to drive the Association through to the next level of providing added value to its members.

The elected Executive members are respon-

sible for protecting the Association's assets (being cash and reputation), ensuring members receive excellent value for their annual membership and conference fees. The role of the Executive has changed over the past six years from being a "hands-on" volunteer looking after certain aspects of the Association, such as publicity, the newsletter, the annual conference, to now concentrating on strategic governance and policy. This still absorbs significant time that executive members continue to give willingly to the Association and New Zealand's pastoral industry.

Table 3 NZGA office bearers 1931-2005.

Secretary		Treasurer		Editor	
1931-48	R P Connell*				
1948-54	S H Saxby*				
1954-55	D J Glue*				
1955-57	R H Scott*				
1957-73	Mrs H Foster*			1968-78	W G Thurston
1973-77	A C Burgess	1976-77	M J Hill		
1977-81	H J Bezar	1977-80	E Roberts	1978-85	J L Brock
1981-84**	J F L Charlton	1980-83	A C P Chu		
1984-87	D R Woodfield	1983-86	P M Matthews	1985-87	R E Burgess
1987-90	P W Theobald	1986-89	P D Kemp	1987-98	M J Baker
1990-91	Ms M Carline	1989-94	I Valentine		
1991-96	B Jamieson	1994-01	C Matthew		
1996-2001	N R Humm	2001-05	I Valentine	1998-01	C F Mercer
2001-04	M Calder			2002-	J D Morton
2005-	R White				

* Founding members.

** Changeover was April 1981 rather than the usual November date.

Table 4 Past and present honorary life members of the NZGA.

Year elected	Name
1948	A H Cockayne
1951	Sir E B Levy
1952	A W Hudson
1954	S H Saxby
1960	A C Hurst
1968	Mrs H N Foster
1969	L Corkill
1971	H Woodyear-Smith
1974	W G Thurston
1976	J P Lambert
1978	R W Brougham
1979	H S Gibbs
1981	A W Hurst
1982	B R Watkin
1983	N A Cullen
1984	J A H Inglis
1988	J G H White
1988	J A Lancashire
1994	J F L Charlton
1996	T W Walker
1997	T R Ellett
2001	G W Sheath
2003	D R Woodfield

Life memberships have been awarded by the NZGA 23 times in the NZGA's history to those giving outstanding service to the Association (Table 4). These people have all carried, pushed and led the Association over its 75-year history and we owe a huge amount of gratitude to them all.

The future

The current Executive has developed a strategic plan to give direction to its activities for the next

three to five years. In addition to drawing on executive member views about the NZGA, each executive member surveyed 5-10 randomly selected members by telephone and worked through some standardised questions. While not a statistically-robust survey, some strong themes were evident from all of those surveyed.

The NZGA should not be a political organisation but should promote the value of research and credible science.

Members want NZGA to be independent/impartial and credible but form independent and local links with companies and groups so long as they support our values.

NZGA needs to continue holding conferences throughout New Zealand as this maintains the "freshness" of the Association.

The majority of members surveyed felt the level of communication is about right with three newsletters per year, regular electronic updates, annual conferences, biannual special symposia, and published Proceedings.

The information flow from science to farming is the NZGA's key role. Members require new information and results about grassland science.

Conferences are a great opportunity for networking, given the breadth of the attendees from the wider agricultural industry.

Growing the membership base

It is essential that the market segments in Table 2 continue to be represented in the NZGA membership at similar levels forwarding the future. The science component provides the technical foundation for the association and the reason for our existence and being. The

Table 5 Potential Market for NZGA Membership – 2004.

	Total market (People)	NZGA share (People)	Total market (%)
Science	500	323	65
Agribusiness	1200	324	27
Farmer Innovators	1500	573	38

Agribusiness and Farmer Innovators are the people who will use and transfer the science from the Conference and drive the networking opportunities for all members at conferences.

The new group that needs to be targeted for membership is that comprising policy implementers. Many of these people sit within regional councils and will be a growing group in the years ahead.

Competitor analysis

An analysis of all other NZ-based associations, field days and conferences was completed. Most other groups are set up to service the needs of their members within three major groupings:

Farmer-focused groups

- South Island Dairy Expo (SIDE)
- Large herds
- Sheep and beef councils
- Deer farmer associations
- High country conference
- Meat or wool monitor farms
- Various benchmarking groups

Science-focused groups

- Agronomy Society
- New Zealand Plant Protection Society
- New Zealand Institute of Agricultural and Horticultural Science
- New Zealand Society of Animal Production
- Fertiliser and Lime Research Centre Workshop
- Invertebrate Conference
- Soil Science Association

Agribusiness-focused groups

- New Zealand Institute of Primary Industry Managers
- New Zealand Association of Resource Managers
- New Zealand Veterinarian Association
- New Zealand Grain and Seed Trade Association

The New Zealand Grassland Association’s uniqueness and strength is the ability to meet the needs of members across the science, education, agribusiness and farmer groups and effectively act as an umbrella group for many specialised groups.

Existing weaknesses the NZGA needs to address

The Executive has identified several issues that need to be resolved in the next future. These include:

- Loss of farmer members from a region after a conference.

- Present collection of arrears in membership fees.

- Managing growth with software and database systems.

- Improving the commercial return for sponsors.

- Communicating the technology and science message in other ways than proceedings and conferences.

- Reduced funding in grasslands research over recent years, limiting the number of high quality papers being offered for publication.

- Lack of contact among members between annual conferences.

Next big steps for the NZGA

The focus or goals of the Association over the short to medium term are listed below. These are in no particular order, but once achieved they should overcome many of the existing weaknesses identified:

- Taking science out to regions in a roadshow format (i.e. intensification seminars being planned at present).

- Producing “best practice” publications based on science.

- Fixing debtor problems and only sending information and proceedings to those who are paid-up members.

- Developing joint projects with the New Zealand Grassland Trust.

- Encouraging other societies to align with the NZGA to increase the science content of conferences.

- Improve sponsorship revenue by providing better value for sponsors.

- Hosting special symposia for industry funders that help to identify deficiencies in knowledge and funding priorities.

NZGA mission statement

A Mission Statement helps to give an organisation some focus and direction to future initiatives. A clear mission statement for our Association will help its members to understand what the NZGA role is and the benefits of being involved. The mission statement for the NZGA is:

To facilitate the adoption of science and technology within NZ pastoral agriculture by:

Figure 2 NZGA annual conference locations 1931-2004.



Interfacing science, agriculture, and farming, fuelled by science and tempered by experience.

Providing opportunities for information dissemination and learning.

Promoting the value of research and its pastoral application.

Providing opportunities for networking.

The Mission statement for the NZGA has been modified over time but still describes the same basic purpose of the Association as A H Cockayne laid down in his 1947 Presidential speech when he said "... that there should be the closest possible and intimate relationship of the grassland farmer, the extension worker and the

research worker, all working to the same end, the betterment of the New Zealand grassland..." (Cockayne 1947)

Summary

As the NZGA enters its 75th year, we can reflect with pride on the positive impact the Association has made throughout its history of communicating grasslands science. The NZGA means different things to all its past and present members, but one consistent comment heard is that this association performs a critical function in communicating science and making it relevant for the grasslands-based industries.

With the dramatic increase in NZ land values over recent years and increased efficiency gains being made from competing grasslands-based nations there has never been a greater need for NZ farmers to adopt new research practice and technology. The challenges for the NZGA will be continuing to “facilitate the adaptation of science and technology” in an environment of reduced agricultural research and increased confidentiality issues relating to commercial funding and patent protection. This will involve significantly more collaboration with other interest groups and a series of more focused “technology transfer” events, rather than reliance on the Annual Conference format as the Association has in the past.

The NZGA has now entered a new era in its development with the employment of a full time Executive secretary. The Executive is conscious of the need to deliver value for this increased investment of the Association’s resources by addressing the opportunities identified through the 2005 strategic planning exercise.

An increase in the standard of living of the average NZ citizen is integrally linked to the ongoing improvement in the sustainability and

efficiency of the country’s biggest industry, the pastoral or grasslands industry. The NZGA will continue to play a significant role as it has in the past through facilitating the adaptation of science and technology in pastoral agriculture.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr Deric Charlton and Dr Derek Woodfield for information from their 1989 paper (Woodfield & Charlton 1989). Also for their help and support in editing and ideas for this paper.

Ross White, Executive Secretary of NZGA, for background information on the Association since 1989. The current NZGA Executive Committee for their input into the 2005 strategic plans and support during my year as President of this great Association.

REFERENCES

- Cockayne, A.H. 1947. Presidential address. *Proceedings of the New Zealand Grassland Association* 9: 1-7.
- Woodfield, D.R.; Charlton, J.F.L. 1989. Over 50 years of communication in Grassland farming. *Proceedings of the New Zealand Grassland Association* 50: 55-64.