

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE ADVISERS

Free farming advice

The Department of Agriculture, formed in 1892, offered free advice to farmers and set up experimental farms and its Fields Division to promote the results of farm trials. This was all at no cost to the farmers.

After the Second World War the Fields Division was reorganised into the Extension Division. It was renamed the Farm Advisory Division in the early 1960s, when officers had a choice of remaining as farm advisers or transferring to the Research Division. In 1972 it became the Advisory Services Division (ASD) in what was now the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF).

ASD also ran the Flock House (North Island) and Telford (South Island) training institutes for farm cadets, and diagnostic laboratories in Auckland, Levin and Christchurch. An official seed testing station was established in Palmerston North to provide purity and germination certificates for every batch of agricultural seeds that were sold by the companies.

User-pays advice

Most services had been provided free to farmers and orchardists until then, and were valued less by farmers - until they were expected to pay! In 1985 the Labour government, as part of its deregulation of the economy, directed that ASD was to be fully funded by user fees within five years.

So ASD was merged with the Agricultural Research Division in 1987 to become MAF Technology - known as MAFTech. In 1990 the advisers were reformed yet again as Agriculture New Zealand, a national consultancy service. This organisation was sold in 1995 to PGG Wrightson Ltd.

Though now part of a private company, Agriculture NZ was contracted by the government to provide technology transfer, farm monitoring, economic surveying and industry training.

Consulting services

Advisory services are now offered to farmers on a fee-paying basis by Agriculture NZ and several competing organisations. Consultants work alone or join together in

partnerships and franchised organisations, such as AgFirst and Agricultural Consulting Services.

Their professional body, the NZ Institute of Primary Industry Management, has 700 members in consultancy, agribusiness, rural financing, research and education. Advisory services are also provided by consultants from industry organisations, which collect levies from farmers, including Meat & Wool NZ, DairyNZ, LIC FarmWise and Fonterra.

Trading banks, insurance and fertiliser companies also employ regional representatives trained in agriculture and horticulture to advise their clients, and the Ministry of Primary Industries (MPI) collects information for the government, and acts as the eyes and ears in rural areas.

International reputation

New Zealand agriculture is known internationally for disseminating research and technology to farmers, using conferences such as NZGA, field days, local events, discussion groups, focus farms and monitor farms.

There are a few remaining newspapers, magazines, and radio and television programmes that might occasionally publicise the results of research work carried out by the crown-owned research institutes - AgResearch, HortResearch and Crop & Food Research, and at Massey and Lincoln universities. AgResearch dispensed with its communicators in 1999 and its profile among the farmers was reduced accordingly. It later changed direction to focus more on food than primary production, influenced by its sources of funding.

NZGA and the Advisers

The NZGA naturally used the Department of Agriculture and later the Ministry of Agriculture's senior regional farm advisers as the key local people to organise each Annual Conference by chairing a Local Organising Committee (LOC).

It was beneficial to both parties to do so, as the farm advisers knew the farmers and the farming in their region better than anyone. Mostly the advisers were pleased to help the NZGA Executive Committee in this way, as they realised that the latter were all volunteers and devoted to livestock farming on pastures.

In addition they soon knew that hosting the Annual Grassland Conference boosted the farming in their area by bringing in new ideas and encouraging the farmers to gain important knowledge - and where to find it. The farmers learned from the visitors and in turn, the visits learned about the region's farming characteristics.

Local Organising Committees

Most of the senior advisers chaired the LOCs when the NZGA Conference was staged in their region. Many then continued in their main work after the Conference, knowing that another two decades would pass before the Conference returned to their region. A few advisers were elected to the NZGA Executive Committee, during the AGM in their area, and went on to be excellent Presidents.

I remember one regional adviser, David Wright, who was working at the MAF Te Kuiti research area when I attended my first NZGA Conference in 1973. He hosted a field tour stop then and in 1980, when the 50th Conference was held in Greymouth, he was the senior regional farm adviser there. And later again when we found that he had moved to another region and yes, we relied on him once again to chair the LOC!

The following LOC chairmen were nearly all advisers, except those we have identified as being in other sectors:

LOC Chairmen

1961	AV Allo	Tauranga
1962	JP Beggs	Blenheim
1963	GR Moss	New Plymouth
1964	EN Young	Greymouth
1965	AA Duncan	Whanganui
1966	ML Smetham	Alexandra
1967	JD Currie	Whangarei
1968	CP Whatman	Ashburton
1969	AK Booth	Masterton
1970	Jim White (education)	Lincoln
1971	RB Gordon	Taupo
1972	AR Rankin	Te Anau
1973	Not listed	Te Kuiti
1974	Not listed	
1975	Not listed	Hastings
1976	Not listed	Nelson
1977	BJ McSweeney	Palmerston North
1978	Not listed	Invercargill
1979	Not listed	Rotorua
1980	DB Wright	Greymouth
1981	BJ Hockings	New Plymouth
1982	Peter Yeoman	Blenheim
1983	John Fitzharris	Gisborne
1984	Pat Dunne	Timaru
1985	JD Currie	Whangarei
1986	John Kell	Alexandra
1987	Gary Goold (research)	Matamata
1988	Ron Duffy	Balclutha

1989	John Hogg (Reg Ccl)	Whanganui
1990	Robin Hughes	Ashburton
1991	Pat Kilgariff	Whakatane
1992	Peter Hook	Gore
1993	Jamie Strang (farmer)	Masterton
1994	Rod Thomson (farmer)	Hanmer Springs
1995	Not listed	Waitangi
1996	Russell Hurst (farmer)	Oamaru
1997	Murray Auld	Mangere
1998	G Sutton (farmer)	Nelson
1999	Not listed	Napier
2000	Not listed	Invercargill
2001	Rory Sherlock (farmer)	Hamilton
2002	Ross Bishop	Greymouth
2003	Derek Woodfield (research)	Palmerston North
2004	Jeremy Savage	Ashburton
2005	Louis Kuriger (farmer)	New Plymouth
2006	David Shepherd (farmer)	Dunedin
2007	Mark Cunningham	Wairakei
2008	Warwick Lissaman (farmer)	Blenheim
2009	Laurie Copland	Waitangi
2010	Derek Moot (education)	Lincoln
2011	Graham Johnson	Gisborne
2012	Nelson Hancox	Gore
2013	Warwick Catto	Tauranga
2014	Vanessa Hore	Alexandra
2015	John Dalziell (farmer)	Masterton
2016	Herstall Ulrich	Timaru
2017	Noel Johnston	Whanganui
2018	Annabelle Subtil	Twizel
2019	Jeff Morton	Napier

The following are some advisers that I've known, who were also active NZGA executive members- typical examples of these great people.

Ray Rankin

Ray joined the Department of Agriculture as a field officer in Invercargill during 1947, after graduating from Lincoln the previous year. He became responsible for the central and western areas of Southland and, as well as his normal on-farm advice, he became involved in experimental work. In this days the advisers were expected to carry out district field trials and run pasture fertiliser trials. Ray also developed an expertise in potato growing from some of his trials, no doubt in eating them too!

He also enjoyed helping the Young Farm Clubs by arranging debates and instructing club members. Ray taught them formal meeting procedure and the benefits from this early tuition were later evident - any meeting he held was well conducted!

In 1966 the Ministry of Agriculture's administrative structure changed and Ray became Southland's Regional Advisory Officer. He had to take less activity in field operations as a result of his increase in responsibility. However, Ray always enjoyed going out on to farms and he maintained wide farmer contacts.

Ray's supervisory role involved him in more committee work around making policy and getting it into action. He helped to set production targets for Southland through its Agricultural Production Council. He chaired the local Noxious Plants Committee and served on many flood and drought relief committees.

Ray was a member of the Southland Catchment Board as well, for 16 years, and he also chaired the Soil Conservation Committee. With all this experience Ray was good at cutting through unnecessary detail with excellent humour. As a result the Invercargill MAF Office gained a reputation for good training of young advisers. Ray always supported his staff in public then afterwards he would quietly point out any errors they may have made.

The Grassland Memorial Trusts recognised Ray's contribution to advisory work generally, and to Southland agriculture in particular, by presenting him with a Special Award in 1978.

Outside his work Ray involved himself in the community. He competed in athletics, played rugby and was a track judge at the Christchurch Commonwealth Games in 1976.

At the 1972 NZGA Conference in Te Anau he was elected to the Executive Committee and continued to serve until he died in 1981. Ray had been involved in the 1960 Invercargill Conference's LOC and chaired the LOC for the Te Anau Conference and the 1978 Invercargill Conference. I appreciated his warm encouragement when I became NZGA Secretary and met Ray while we were organising the 1981 New Plymouth Conference.

Back in 1963 an adviser called **Geoff Moss** chaired the LOC in New Plymouth. Geoff went on to be Head of Information Technology - AgLinks and other popular farming information services - in MAF Head Office. He retired but is still going strong in his 90s, I'm told.

Brian McSweeney was elected to the Executive Committee at the 1977 Conference in Palmerston North and he continued to serve until 1982 when he retired to live near his twin brother Des. I knew Des McSweeney from a visit he made to us in Ayr, Scotland before we moved to New Zealand in 1973. Brian and his twin brother Des married

twins, but tragically Brian's wife died suddenly on the night he retired. He moved to Akaroa to be near Des and brewed his own beer on his lifestyle block just over the hill until he died some years later.



David Wright

David Wright was the unlucky regional adviser who chaired the LOC in Greymouth in 1980. NZGA had already involved him at the Te Kuiti Conference in 1973 when he talked on a visit to the research station just outside the town. He was also regional adviser in Tauranga a few years later...

Brian (Hank) Hockings led the LOC in New Plymouth during 1981 when I became Secretary. On the afternoon before the meeting began in the Devon Motor Lodge, it was discovered that the wiring for audio and video was ancient and very dangerous. An electrician was called and he spent two hours rewiring the system. The air was blue during this operation...

All went well until the Conference Dinner, when Hank had booked a local music hall group to entertain us. Unfortunately a few members, who tended to play up at these events, became well lubricated before the dinner and a couple of them crawled on all fours to the low stage and playfully tried to bite the backsides of the female performers. The music hall act stopped, and soon Hank and I went backstage to apologise for the behaviour. The local group was furious, never having had such treatment before, but all we could do was to apologise. I believe that Hank and Treasurer Alex Chu gave the local group a consolation payment later. It was also the only time I wore my kilt to a Conference Dinner!

The 1982 Conference in Blenheim saw the popular regional adviser **Peter Yeoman** elected to the Executive and continuing on to be President. Peter had a nightmare start to the Conference itself when he discovered that the Projection Room in the new Wesley Centre venue was far too far away from the screen. It was a theoretical effort by the architect because, not only was it too far away but there was no ventilation in the small, high level room. The meeting then went really well, with Peter Yeoman leading the field trip to stops in the Wairau Valley and along the coast to Kekerengu.

In Gisborne during 1983 the regional adviser **John Fitzharris** was an experienced hand heading the LOC. His only problem was Past-President Jim Inglis kept mixing John's name with the 1983 President John Toxopeus - Jim frequently called Fitzharris "Fitzopeus" or "Toxharris"!

In the winter leading up to the Conference John guided us to possible field tour stops, and we saw the famous Tarndale Slip at the top of a gully, then planted all around with pine trees that the foresters believed were not ever going to be harvestable. We intended to include a visit to a Māori Incorporation property that was slightly scarred by slips,

but permission was withdrawn. During the planning trip, Peter Yeoman was seen buying Gisborne wine to take home to Marlborough!

The first morning was held at the Poho-O-Rawiri Marae in Kaiti and John Fitzharris led us in an Official Welcome in the entrance to the Meeting House.

Everything proceeded well that morning, and the hosts wanted NZGA to hold the whole Conference there! John was duly elected to the Executive but only served for a year.

In 1984 **Pat Dunne** was a well-known MAF adviser who chaired the LOC at Timaru. The actual regional adviser **Brian Parker** served on the LOC but let Pat be the chairman. Sadly, Pat had to look after his incapacitated wife at home when he wasn't advising the farmers. He enjoyed New Zealand beer, so wanted NZGA to promote the Timaru Conference by having a special label on beer bottles being sold in local pubs. But as 18 pallets (a huge quantity) was the minimum order, we declined this proposal. We figured that Pat might have wanted to consume some of it himself...

Ron Duffy was an agronomist/farm adviser with the Ravensdown Fertiliser Co-operative, based in Dunedin from June 1987 onwards, chaired the LOC at the Balclutha Conference in 1989. Ron knew the farmers and the farming in his region and was able to feature some excellent examples at the events.

Colin Brown grew up on a sheep and beef farm in the Manuherikia Valley and attended John McGlashan College in Dunedin. He had a year working on the family farm, then went to Lincoln College for three years, and completed a BAgCom. He began working at the Rural Bank in Blenheim, providing discounted loans to farmers before spending ten years farming sheep and beef in South Otago.



Colin Brown

While there he won the 1982 Skellerup Young Farmer of the Year contest. He followed that by 18 years as an agricultural consultant, working with MAF and then Agriculture New Zealand.

Colin joined NZGA in 1989 at the Balclutha Conference, through serving on LOC. He continued attending for the next 20 years and was elected onto the Executive Committee in 1996 at Oamaru. He served eight years, during which he was President during 2003-04.

During this time, he worked with Richard Green and Derek Woodfield to change NZGA operational procedure, from relying largely on volunteer input to having a paid secretariat for managing day-to-day business. The Executive Committee was then able to focus only on governance.

In 2005 Colin started *TracMap*, which is now the largest Agricultural GPS business in New Zealand and many other countries. Colin installed the first 50 units in fertiliser trucks in October 2007, and two years later over half the fertiliser spreading trucks in

the country were running under *TracMap* GPS guidance.

Today, *TracMap* is allowing the New Zealand pastoral farming industry to be more competitive in world markets, through achieving reduced cost and improved effectiveness of fertiliser and spray application to pasture, and the “proof of placement” compliance that comes bundled as part of *TracMap*.

Colin is now enjoying a retirement in Mosgiel, where he’s actively involved in Rotary and other local community organisations.

Marie Casey

Marie has been the backbone of NZGA since 2009 - the Association and communication of pastoral agriculture would be in a sorry state, were it not for her as the Executive Officer.



Marie Casey

Marie completed her Masters degree at Lincoln in 1992, moved to North Carolina for three years with her partner David Stevens, to enable him to undertake a doctorate. During these years Marie and David had a son and daughter.

Since then, Marie’s career has focused on farming systems and agricultural extension design and management.

Marie worked with Agriculture NZ during 1998 to 2005. She was then the business services manager for Thomas Electronics (2005) Ltd, a business that Colin Brown had bought to give him the background for starting his *Tracmap* fertiliser-spreading software business. Marie returned to PGG Wrightson, when

Colin sold Thomas Electronics, as technical consultant working on developing business opportunities for GPS in farm mapping; and marketing then technical support of a do-it-yourself farm mapping package.

Since 2009 she has been both a consultant and the Executive Officer of NZGA, based in Mosgiel. In both of these roles there is significant emphasis on project management, at the implementation and financial guidance levels.

In 2009, Marie Casey and NZGA President and Otago farmer/businessman, Pat Garden, discovered that the Association was in a poor financial situation. They set out to turn it around, and helped by former Thomas Electronics co-owner, Glenis Thomas as finance administrator, they have succeeded.

Over the last decade Marie has worked with the Presidents and Executive members to achieve a thriving NZGA once more. She has also successfully overseen the event management of 13 conferences and 3 symposia. Over this period she has been an author/co-author for ten NZGA papers, including one on the NZGA history.

It's certainly a credit to her - and some far-thinking executive members who decided that NZGA needed professional organisation - that NZGA is still alive and kicking.

Grassline Pasture Advice

In the late 1980s DSIR Grasslands director John Lancashire decided to form a pasture advisory service. He named it Grassline and recruited MAF adviser Gavin Milne, then based in Oamaru, to manage it. Several researchers were added to the team:

- Bruce Cooper, a clover breeder based at Kaikohe;
- Simon Moloney, who had evaluated mixed pastures in dryland;
- Tom Fraser, experienced pasture evaluator based at Lincoln;
- David Turner, another experienced pasture trials worker based at Gore.

The main Grassline concept for Grassline was to resolve farmers' pasture problems by using effective seeds mixtures that resolved the problem - not restricted to the *Grasslands* range of pasture plants.

Bruce Cooper, Tom Fraser and David Turner continued their evaluations when they weren't advising farmers, and the team featured in presentations to explain pasture renovation and management to farmers and seed company personnel.

The main Grassline success, however, was establishing demonstration pastures in dryland regions along the east coast of both North and South Islands during the early 1990s. The idea was that a range of drought-tolerant pasture plants was available to farmers struck by drought, and the best way to educate them about these pasture mixtures was to grow a demonstration paddock in each district that they could regularly check on - "over the fence learning" has usually been successful in rural areas.

Two projects, one in North Island and the other in eastern South Island, were funded by Government through MAF, and the subsequent uptake of the drought-tolerant pasture plants was substantial. In dry periods the pastures sown to deeper rooted mixtures based on species including tall fescue, cocksfoot, phalaris, lucerne, red clover, chicory and improved upright-growing plantain - but not all together - were green, productive and readily grazed. Later, Simon Moloney departed to be a pasture consultant for the Landcorp farms, and was replaced by Mark Hamilton-Manns.

However, restructuring and lack of funding led to further work and Grassline faded into history. Gavin Milne went to Australia to promote tall fescue in areas where regress pastures needed irrigation, and since then has worked for seed companies in South Island. Simon Moloney set himself up as a consultant in the Bay of Plenty after working with Landcorp. Dave Turner was diagnosed with a brain tumour, and died; Tom Fraser and Bruce Cooper have since retired.

Murray Auld was a soft-spoken regional adviser at Pukekohe when the Annual Conference went urban at Mangere in 1996.



Murray Auld

He was probably the last regional adviser to lead the LOC that year, as ASD was sold in 1995 to PGG Wrightson Ltd and those involved had to pursue the company policies.

Murray Auld did a marvellous job that week, keeping the conference running to schedule.

Tony Rhodes

Tony was the first farm adviser to receive the Ray Brougham Trophy, mainly for his involvement in national projects with Meat & Wool NZ and Beef & Lamb NZ.

I first knew him in 1976 when he helped me to select suitable sites on sheep and beef farms in Southern Hawke's Bay.

I wanted to evaluate white clover persistence under the farmer's own grazing regime, and at different soil moisture levels.



Tony Rhodes

He has worked closely over the decades with DSIR/AgResearch Grasslands researchers since then, involved in research that:

- Helped farmers to understand sustainable land management and the ecology of farming systems.
- Developed systems for reducing sediment runoff.
- Reduced nutrient and bacterial (*E.coli*) losses to farm streams.

In the past two decades Tony has also helped the parasitology research effort by AgResearch. He has been at the forefront of interpreting new knowledge, packaging it and communicating it to the farmers. He was also involved in *SUBS*, an education package helping farmers to map their soils. Tony is an excellent facilitator, engaging farming groups in debating climate change and greenhouse gas issues. He has recently been working with Māori agriculturalists, helping them to resolve problems.

He has also implemented a large project involving large-scale conversion of sheep and beef operations to organic supply; and he has facilitated a review of NZ soil management, smoothing the way to ensure its success.

Tony has always been keen to be involved in constructive debate, whether on policy around response to extreme events, water quality and greenhouse gas emissions or drench resistance in livestock. Throughout his career Tony has always focused on

effects of an innovation on the farm and the business. He has emphasised the importance of identifying any likely barriers to the farming industry when it is adopting new technology.

He has been instrumental in developing, acquiring funding and managing several major industry initiatives - the national drench resistance surveys, the Best Practice parasite management programme, and a programme looking at the unexpected consequences in long-acting animal drench treatments. His contribution to animal health research and its extension has been substantial over many years.