

THE MCMEEKAN MEMORIAL AWARD



The McMeekan Memorial Award was established by this Society in 1974 to be used in recognition of someone who has made an outstanding contribution to animal production or to the Society. Your Management Committee has selected as this year's recipient Dr J. B. Hutton who has made a contribution in both areas.

Dr Hutton obtained his initial qualifications at Massey College (B.Agr.Sc., 1951, M.Agr.Sc., 1953, first-class honours in animal husbandry)

and while there was awarded the Sir James Wilson prize (1950) and the Shell Scholarship in Agriculture (1952). He was employed by the DSIR farm survey group from 1951 to 1953 and as a lecturer at Massey College in 1954. From 1955 to 1958 he was a scientific officer attached to the Feeding, Metabolism and Physiology Departments at the National Institute for Research in Dairying, Shinfield, England, and while there he gained a Ph.D. from the University of Reading in 1957.

In 1958, Dr Hutton joined the staff of the Nutrition Section at the Ruakura Animal Research Station and became scientist-in-charge of the section in 1961. In 1975 he was appointed Assistant Director (Animals) of the Agricultural Research Division of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Some of those who know Dr Hutton may be surprised to learn that during his career in research he has contributed to 56 published papers. More commonly known is the fact that Dr Hutton was a member of this Society's Management Committee for 6 years and its President in 1966-7. He was the New Zealand representative on the executive committee of the World Association of Animal Production from 1964 to 1968 and has represented New Zealand at several international conferences, chaired meetings, and presented five invited plenary papers.

He was a member of the Council of the New Zealand Institute of Agricultural Science in 1967-8 and was awarded a Fellowship of that Institute in 1973.

While his contribution to agricultural science has been outstanding, his extension activities, particularly in the last five years, have been, for a scientist, almost unique, and it is for these activities that the McMeekan award is primarily being made.

Dr Hutton commenced his career at Ruakura with the not uncommon attitude of scientists to extension work — an attitude, almost scornful, of practical research which was difficult, if not impossible to interpret because reasons for the results would not be obtained; that a lot of “half-baked” information was presented to farmers at conferences; and that scientists were employed to do research not extension work. How strongly he held these views is difficult to judge — he being a person who was by no means averse to raising controversial issues or criticizing established practices for the sake of argument — however, it has been noted that over the years if not a change in attitude, a very definite change in procedures has taken place whereby he has undertaken more field work and advisers and farmers were welcome to join him in viewing and discussing work and results.

Until the mid-1960s Dr Hutton was mainly involved with indoor feeding studies aimed at defining better the requirements of pasture-fed dairy cattle and how feed supplies could best be manipulated to maximize dairy production. His early extension efforts at Ruakura Farmers' Conference — “estimating the feed requirements of grazing cows” and “variations in dairy cow efficiency” in 1962 and 1963 reflected his original research pursuits.

In 1965 there began a series of papers and field-day demonstrations which showed the shift to an outdoor environment. Reports on “farming two dairy cows per acre”, “meal feeding for milk production”, “better winter feeding”, “coping with droughts”, and “maize for dairying” appeared at almost yearly intervals, a very considerable feat in itself, and almost all dealt with experiments conducted with grazing animals.

Dr Hutton's refusal to carry out experiments which would not yield information giving at least a partial explanation of the results obtained led to the development of his best known extension activity. To measure the intake of grazing cattle he developed the “eye assessment” technique for measuring dry matter available both before and after grazing — a technique which was perfected to a high degree by calibration with cut and weighed

areas of pasture. This technique began to be used throughout the year as a basis for planning and management decisions.

About 1970 John Hutton with one of his technicians began to employ the eye assessment technique on a regular basis. At 8 a.m. every Monday morning they set out on a 20 km hike estimating the amount of feed on every paddock of the experimental farmlets. Together with other measures they used this information as a basis for the weekly management decisions. Without any advertising they started to be joined by a group of followers — advisers and farmers — clambering over two-wire mains-operated fences. Some stayed for a half hour, others all morning. Most became disciples to a greater or lesser degree. All wanted to get themselves calibrated; some wanted to have a chat with John Hutton on any one of a host of farming matters. Daily attendances varied from a few at the height of the calving or harvesting season to 30 to 40 during winter. Most had dairy farming interests but there was also a sprinkling of sheep men. It was not too long before the term “feed budgeting” was coined and people started describing feed in kg of dry matter per hectare.

Advisers throughout the country have started to use the method in various ways, as have the Australians and Irish. At recent Ruakura Field Days Dr Hutton’s “stand”, complete with plots of grass, cows of different weights and grades, and often heaps of silages, has been one of the best attended and his explanations, usually far too long, most carefully listened to.

The important aspect of the development of the eye assessment technique is that, while it has been a single factor, the information derived can be put together with many other pieces of agronomic, nutritional and economic data for the formulation of complete feeding practices for every district and farm in the country. Its development has focused attention on rational methods of producing feedstuffs and livestock products.

To interest so many in such a wide topic, Dr Hutton’s extension contribution has been of major significance and one of which Dr McMeekan would have been proud.

A. H. KIRTON
President