

SIR ARTHUR WARD AWARD 1995

New Zealand Meat and Wool Board's Economic Service

This organisation with a lean and mean staff, comprising of a Director and 3 economists plus field and support staff, has had a major influence on NZ agriculture. This through provision of factual survey data showing what was actually happening in terms of stock numbers and profitability for Animal Production, the major single component of the export industry. Even Government uses the Survey as a reliable source of information on the farming industry.

The Economic Service was established just over 40 years ago in 1950 after a Royal Commission of Inquiry into the sheep farming industry reported on the need for accurate and independent information on farm costs. At that time and until 1954, the New Zealand Government sold all this country's sheepmeat production under bulk-purchase agreements to Britain. Growers costs, for the purpose of payment, had been calculated by MAF who were not considered to be independent. In 1952 the Meat Board first used statistical data provided by the service to argue its case for farmers to the government, resulting in an increase in payment of 2 million pounds – enough to pay, in those days, for the costs of the service for many years.

The accuracy of the figures the service has produced since that time is determined by the largely painstaking work carried out by the 9 field officers the service employs (6 in the NI and 3 in the SI). These officers visit the farmers included in the random sample to encourage them to provide the required information on time. Nearly 600 farmers are surveyed nationally each year. The farmers who participate in the information collection system do so by mutual agreement. Farmers stay in the survey until rotated out to meet statistical criteria or until the farm is sold or subdivided. The information provided by the services is a valuable extension tool for farmers who can compare their performance with other farmers in the survey. Field officers see their work as a confidential job being done for livestock farming as a whole. In 1989, the accumulated database was estimated to be worth over \$30 million on the basis of collection costs at that time.

Three representatives from both the Meat Board and the Wool Board, one of whom is elected as chairman, make up the

Committee which runs the economic service. The director and staff of the Meat and Wool Board's Economic Service are responsible to that committee rather than the individual Boards. The position of chairman rotates so that both Boards get an opportunity to lead. The enviable reputation achieved by the Economic Service is the direct result of its total independence and its directors' unquestionable integrity over the past 40 years.

Directors have included such people as Mr F.L. Ward, N.W. Taylor (Past President and Fellow of NZIAS and now Meat Board representative in Europe) and the present incumbent, R.M. Davison (Past President and Fellow of NZIAS). The Director's position involves a lot of communication with the Boards and their electoral committee, with farmers, stock and station agents, Federated Farmers, the media, agribusiness people and meat companies. This communication has commonly involved presentations at farmers' conferences and other farmers meetings and has involved considerable travelling with often 3-4 speeches a week. Reports and communication from the service have been widely disseminated through the news media.

Over the years, the work of the economic service has changed from recording and reporting to interpretation and forecasting. The surveys are designed to measure historical trends over time. Forecasting is aimed at predicting short term and medium term future trends, an essential component for industry planning purposes and for survival. This signal service to industry has been of value to all its sectors including research and has contributed significantly to the development of systems models such as selection strategies for sire breeders.

Given the large extension and communication component of the work of the NZ Meat and Wool Board's Economic Service, we believe they are a most appropriate recipient of the Sir Arthur Ward Award for 1995.

Acknowledgement

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