LIFE MEMBERSHIP

J.B. HUTTON

The New Zealand Society of Animal Production commenced its activities here in Wellington and this Conference in a special way marks the 50th Jubilee. On this occasion it is indeed fitting that John Brassel Hutton who started his academic training in this city and at Victoria University (College) where this Jubilee meeting is being held, and who would later return to Wellington as a Research Administrator in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries following a most active scientific career is nominated for Life Membership of the Society.

Dr Hutton graduated B.Agr.Sc. from Massey Agricultural College (1951). Then followed a two-year period with the DSIR Farm Survey Group and lead to his "Study of Dairy Farm Management in Waipa County" which gained him M.Agr.Sc with First Class Honours in Animal Husbandry (1953). Among his fellow students he also gained "the critic" as a name of endearment. He was Lecturer in Dairy Husbandry at Massey College (1954) and for three years Scientific Officer at National Institute Research in Dairying, Shinfield and was awarded the Ph.D. degree from the University of Reading. In 1958 he joined the staff of the Nutrition Section at Ruakura Animal Research Station and became Scientist-in-Charge in 1961.

The challenge of developing a Nutrition Centre and a new No. 5 Dairy at Ruakura (because of the expansion of Waikato University on to nearby Ruakura farmland) was eagerly undertaken and over the next few years John Hutton orchestrated the massive task of getting facilities and staff operational. Not only was there land development including drainage, contouring, racing, water reticulation, and fencing, but there was also building-a dairy shed, individual feeding stalls for dairy cattle, sheep and calves, feed preparation rooms, offices, laboratories, silage bunkers, and a freezer capable of holding 100t of pasture. Further additions were facilities for beef cattle, sheep and cattle calorimeters, a tower silo for maize silage, irrigation facilities for up to 20 hectares, and plant protein extraction facilities.

By the late 1970s, one of the best equipped nutrition research centres in the world had been developed. Included in the 70 staff that Dr Hutton had gathered around him were a group of scientists who then, and subsequently, had a considerable influence on animal production in New Zealand. Undoubtedly one of the reasons for this was because of the fine example that the Group Leader set the staff he controlled - hard work, refusal to tolerate argument that was based on emotion rather than fact, accountability for ones own decisions, and actions, the satisfaction of achievement through a job well done, and loyalty to staff. These characteristics were illustrated time and time again during his subsequent career.

Dr Hutton's research work as a scientist has been in determining the requirements of pasture-fed dairy cattle and how feed supplies could be manipulated to give maximum dairy production. These trials involved cows fed known amounts of feed indoors and more importantly in grazing situations. To measure the intake of grazing cows he developed the "eye assessment" technique for measuring dry matter available both before and after grazing, the technique being refined by calibration with cut and weighed areas of pasture. The method has provided an improved basis for planning and management of feed supplies on the dairy farm and it has lead to feed budgeting as a practice becoming widely applied to the management of grazing livestock. The dissemination of these results to farmers and Advisers at Conferences and at field days has been an important objective of his work and extension activities and many in the industry have closely followed Hutton's farmlet studies even to the extent of accompanying him on farm walks as pasture monitoring was being recorded in the 1970's.

Dr Hutton was appointed in 1975 as Assistant Director (Animals) within the Agricultural Research Division. He was now concerned with wider research issues than the feeding and management of dairy cows. He set about his new role with characteristic thoroughness. Some scientists found for the first time that their research proposals were subject to the minutest

scrutiny and lengthy correspondence flowed around the country demanding further justification, peer review, meaningful collaboration amongst scientists, and consideration of possibilities alternative to those proposed. Publications too were subjected to a similar scrutiny and Dr Hutton quickly built up a thorough knowledge of the animal research in progress and an appreciation of the qualities of the staff involved. This was a trying time for many who were not accustomed to having their work, methods, views or outputs questioned and were unfamiliar with the Hutton methods.

The Agricultural Research Division headquarters staff were at that time located at Ruakura. All this was changed in 1979 when Dr Hutton now as Director of Agricultural Research and his associated staff were reluctantly relocated in Wellington. Never before had the hierarchy of the Department of Agriculture/Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries been in such close contact with those given the responsibility of conducting agricultural research. The responsibility was large as indicated by a total staff of nearly 1200 of which about 270 were scientists and 540 were science technicians. Herein lies what is probably his greatest contribution, that of establishing within the minds of the Wellington hierarchy the role for and importance of, agricultural research, not only within MAF but also in New Zealand. It is well known that he challenged the hierarchy's views of research and scientists, and he challenged the way they thought. He changed both.

This was at a time of considerable debate on the direction that New Zealand should take as a country, exemplified by the emergence of the "Think Big" policies. It was also a time of ever increasing competition for funding and that available for science was particularly under threat. Much of Dr Hutton's effort therefore was directed towards identifying the important opportunities for growth in agriculture, defining the way that science within MAF could facilitate this growth, and obtaining the necessary resources. As was the hallmark of all his work, he set about gathering the information that was in his view, an essential step before entering into battle. He made use of everyone and everything that could contribute; reports from bodies like the New Zealand Planning council, the papers of individual economists, and he even employed his own experts to assess the payoff to past research and the likely returns from alternative future research.

One of the opportunities clearly identified was the importance of re-importing "exotic" sheep so as to lift the performance of the national flock. That Dr Hutton was able to bring about the second importation in 1983/84, so soon after the abandonment in 1978 of the first, say so much of his ability to assemble and use facts to win arguments. It must be satisfying to know that offspring of this importation of embryos of three breeds will be released from quarantine to the industry later this year and breeders and farmers will have the opportunity to use this genetic material and that from a later importation in a variety of ways for improvement in sheep production.

In developing the guidelines for research investment in New Zealand agriculture he was unafraid to tackle the Producer Boards. In delivering the Professor William Riddet Memorial Address at Awahuri in 1981, he told the dairy industry that the evidence was that the opportunity for growth in export returns was greater for sheep and beef cattle than for dairying. As a research administrator he therefore concluded that although Dairying was not to be overlooked, research manpower and resources must be re-directed towards realising the major expansions possible in the meat and wool industries, in the horticultural sector, and in a few promising new agricultural production and processing developments. The news media had a heyday.

Nor did the meat industry escape his close scrutiny. There is a voluminous report with F.W. Phillips entitled "Sheep meats study tour of Northern Europe and the USA Oct/Nov 1985" which had an immeasurable effect on the direction, resourcing, and thinking within MAF. One further testimony of his achievements and commitment to Agricultural Research is the substantial increase in the research presence in the South island as illustrated by the rebuilding of the Invermay complex and the establishment of the combined DSIR MAF facility at Lincoln in the form of the Canterbury Agricultural Centre.

Over the years John Hutton has been an active and strong supporter of the Society. He served on the Management Committee for six years and was President in 1966-1967. His Presidential address to the 27th Annual conference foreshadowed his thinking on some important issues for New Zealand Animal Production at the time and many of these ideas have been developed as a result of his research and administrative contribu-

tions. He was the recipient of the McMeekan Memorial Award in 1976 and was elected to a Fellowship of the New Zealand Institute of Agricultural Science in 1973.

Agricultural Science and especially Animal Production owes much to this man. It is because of his contributions as a scientist, as an artist in technology transfer, as a role model for others, and as an Agricultural research administrator that his election to honorary life membership of this Society is recommended. He is a man one can respect. You may disagree with him, but not ignore him.

M.F. McDonald
A.M. Bryant