

The role of the New Zealand Grassland Association in technology interaction and policy evolution

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Introduction The New Zealand Grassland Association (NZGA) aims for a two-way communication between grassland researchers and pastoral farmers on research findings and farming trends and opportunities. Annual conferences, special symposia, print and electronic publications as well as the web site are used to further these aims. Policy evolution is indirect, using the relationship with agribusiness sponsors and members to promote research objectives.

NZGA The NZGA was established in 1931 as a result of a meeting involving agricultural policy makers, scientists, academics and commercial representatives called to discuss “the betterment of research, investigation, demonstration or instruction in grassland management”.

Membership The NZGA places strong emphasis on recruiting and retaining farmer members as they are considered important sources of information about the application of technology, areas for further investigation, problems and possible improvements. Agribusiness representatives are also encouraged for their feedback. Currently the membership is around 1400, balanced between farmers/producers (some 45%) and scientists (25%), consultants (5%), educators (10%) and agribusiness (15%).

Technology transfer The NZGA provides a forum for farmers, researchers, consultants, educators and commercial people to gain the latest information on the latest scientific progress and production advances in grassland establishment and management, and to exchange information farming trends, opportunities, problems and developments. The NZGA organises an annual conference where the venue moves around the country, and at least one session focuses on topics of practical interest or technology transfer and provides take home messages for producers. In addition there are field trips to selected farms to back up the messages delivered in the presentation sessions.

Special symposia have been introduced in recent years to cover research developments on particular topics in greater depth than might be achieved during a conference; again at least one session is devoted to practical issues. Examples have been Ryegrass Endophyte, Deer Nutrition and Management, and Legumes for Dryland Pastures. Further symposia are being developed.

Communication In addition to publishing the proceedings of each conference and symposium the NZGA produces a newsletter three/four times per year and regular “e-zines” are issued. The NZGA web site www.grassland.org.nz is also used to communicate and encourage membership. Visitors can search the database of all our publications and see abstracts of papers; however full versions of the papers are restricted to financial members. The association publishes a CD containing the papers from each annual conference, which is sold to members at a modest price.

Scholarships and awards High standards in the grassland farming industry are encouraged through annual awards for regional farming excellence and a special award for outstanding contributions to grassland industry and technology, promoted by the NZ Grassland Trust. The Trust also provides annual scholarships for agricultural science students.

Sponsorship and commercial relationships Sponsors are an important part of the operations of the Association, with emphasis on the agribusiness sector. Some government research funding agencies were committed, but as a result of the declining direct financial support considerable effort has been directed into developing and maintaining relations with the commercial sector, particularly farm supply, seed and fertiliser companies.

Policy evolution Until recently the NZGA employed no permanent staff, so policy development and promotion was undertaken informally via interested members, or *ad hoc* sub committees. However the close association the NZGA enjoys with government research funders and providers, as well as the connections with agribusiness enterprises ensures that the Association’s views are registered.

Reference

Woodfield D. R. & J.F.L. Charlton (1989). NZ Grassland Association: Over 50 years of communication in grassland farming. *Proceedings of the New Zealand Grassland Association*, 50, 55-64.