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**An Application of
Soft Systems Methodology
in the On-Farm Labour Situation
in the New Zealand Dairy Industry**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Agricultural Science in Farm Management
at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.

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ABSTRACT

The Farmer First Research (FFR) programme at Massey University has the primary aim of researching and adapting the application of soft systems approaches to ill-defined and complex problem situations in the New Zealand dairy industry. The labour situation on many New Zealand dairy farms was identified as problematic for a large number of people in the dairy industry. A number of poorly understood, interrelated problems comprise the situation that is viewed differently by people in the situation. A soft systems approach was applied to the on-farm labour situation to obtain an understanding of the situation that would assist people to define action to improve the situation.

From a review of six soft systems approaches, Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) was selected for application in the on-farm labour situation. A partial iteration of the most recent articulation of SSM (Checkland and Scholes 1990) was undertaken. A rich description of the problem situation was developed from problem-owner interviews and secondary data sources. The information obtained was analysed to identify the elements of structure, process and climate in the situation. Also, an analysis of the intervention and analyses of the social and political aspects of the situation was made.

Livestock Improvement Advisory, the farm management group within Livestock Improvement Corporation in the New Zealand dairy industry, are strongly involved in servicing the needs of dairy farmers. This group have the resources and ability to improving components of the on-farm labour situation and were allocated the role of primary-decision taker for the SSM inquiry. On the basis of their role and influence in the problem situation five relevant human activity systems were selected from the rich description. The five relevant systems were modelled to assist Livestock Improvement Advisory to debate and define action to improve the on-farm labour situation.

Key Words: Soft Systems Methodology; on-farm labour, relevant human activity systems, Livestock Improvement Advisory, New Zealand dairy farming.

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