Investigating the research requirements of a dairy farming community.

Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree
of Master
of Agricultural Science in Farm Management
at Massey University New Zealand

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1995

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In preparing this report I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Alan McRae, for invaluable guidance in my learning experience, and report editing. I also acknowledge Dick Kuiper assisted with survey development and data collection, and the Agricultural and Horticultural Faculty for their teaching and support throughout the year. I am also grateful for encouragement and guidance from Janet Reid.

Guy Vickers, Penny Back and Dick Kuiper assisted with conducting the farmer survey, for which I thank them. I also thank the farmers and the Dairy Liaison Group members who so willingly gave their time and knowledge to help with this research, and to Andrew Watters of Tui Milk Products Ltd., for assisting with industry information.

I also acknowledge sponsorship from the Australian Dairy Research and Development Corporation and Agriculture Victoria, without who's support I would not have been able to partake in this study programme.

And lastly I am grateful to friends both in New Zealand and Australia, especially to my dear friend and partner Peter Neaves, for their support and encouragement.

ABSTRACT

Case studies, a formal survey and interaction with an industry liaison group were investigated and compared as techniques for eliciting information on farmers research needs. Dairy farmers in the Manawatu district of New Zealand and a Massey University dairy industry liaison group were involved in the research.

Farmer case studies provided contextual information on farmers' situations, defined the activities that farmers were investigating so as to achieve their goals, and outlined the problems and constraints farmers face in carrying out these activities. Few of the problems mentioned by farmers were of a technical nature. Case study interviews with DLG members provided a list of technical and managerial problems, with no context as to when and under what circumstances these problems occur.

The case study interviews with the farmers highlighted the importance of understanding farmer circumstances when collecting information on their research needs. Without this context there is no basis for understanding why issues are a problem on farm, and how they might be overcome. Conducting a formal survey was rejected as a technique for eliciting farmers' research needs in the wider farming community because of the limited amount of contextual information that can be collected through this technique.

A formal survey was used to compare farmers' and an industry liaison groups' perception of a range of specific issues. For some issues farmer perceptions were reflected by those of the industry liaison group, while for other issues they were not. In other cases there was a wide range of response from both farmers and industry liaison group members.

The dairy industry liaison group did not accurately reflect the farmers' perceptions on all issues. Thus where issues have important consequences for the industry or large investments are made, wider farmer consultation should be sought. The diversity of opinion amongst the industry liaison group suggests that group needs to be taken with group decision making.

The results of this study support a call for the further development of research methods which formally investigate the research issues that farmers face on their farm. Such efforts should complement traditional research activities carried out on University farms.

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TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS

CIDR	Controlled Intravaginal Drug Releaser
DLG	Dairy Liaison Group
FFR	Farmer First Research
FSR	Farming Systems Research
LIC	Livestock Improvement Corporation