
THE CHANGING PATTERN OF ADVISORY WORK

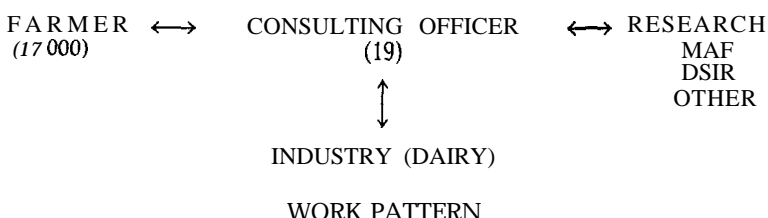
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Abstract

From a random sample of 10 discussion groups, production per farm for those with an average of 6 years in a group was 6621 kg milkfat ahead of those in their first year. The farmers joining discussion groups were producing at district average at the time of joining. The extension input to obtain these results on 106 farms amounted to less than that of half a consulting officer. There would appear to be a potential to lift national dairy production by 10% over the next 10 years within those farmers not making regular use of extension services alone. The initial contact with these farmers would need to be made through unsolicited visiting.

THE Herd Improvement Plan was introduced in 1939 "to increase the net financial return to the average dairy farmer". To assist in bringing this about, the Consulting Officer service was introduced in 1940. This was to be a whole-farm approach and "to have the dairy farmer's well-being as its immediate interest". These objectives still hold today and in present circumstances could be diagrammatically presented as:



Detailed records of the work analysis for consulting officers were not introduced until 1954-5. However, descriptive records of those earlier years are available and it is from these that the 1940-45 work pattern given in Table 1 has now been drawn.

The initial few request visits soon increased with a consequent decline in the frequency of the follow-up and unsolicited visits.

To test any similarity between the 1940 model farmer and the 1980 model, six consulting officers have deliberately carried out a

TABLE 1: AVERAGE WORK PATTERN OF A CONSULTING OFFICER

Period	<i>Requested Visits (%)</i>	<i>Follow-up Visits (%)</i>	<i>Unsolicited Visits (%)</i>	<i>No. of Discussion Groups</i>
1940-45	Few	Moderate	Considerable	0
1955-60	44	48	8	8
1973-78	78	14	7	18

number of unsolicited visits. In five of these cases, spread from central Waikato to southern South Island, the number of farmers involved has been relatively small, ranging from 10 to 60. With no further follow-up by the adviser there has been better than a 50% response in the form of requests for further visits.

In the 1978-9 season, a further consulting officer made 110 unsolicited visits. The response in this case was:

- 75 of these farmers have subsequently requested visits
- 20 have joined existing discussion groups
- 5 new discussion groups have been formed in districts not previously serviced by a group.

The concept of farm discussion groups was introduced in 1952 by the then Director of the Farm Production Division, A. H. (now Sir Arthur) Ward. Today the average consulting officer works with 215 discussion group members, plus a further 80 non-discussion group farmers per year (N.Z. Dairy Board Annual Report, 1978-9). As a measure of the impact of this extension, ten Waikato groups have been randomly selected and their 1978-9 productions have been ranked against the number of years within a group (Table 2).

TABLE 2: YEARS IN DISCUSSION GROUP AND PRODUCTION CHANGES

	<i>No. of Years in Group</i>				<i>5-1.5 (av. 6)</i>
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	
No. farms (106)	24	27	15	7	33
Survey area (ha)	58	59	60	63	58
Cows in milk (Jan. 1979)	114	141	139	148	156
Stocking rate (cows/ha)	1.97	2.39	2.32	2.35	2.69
Production per farm	17603	21608	20595	24020	24224
Production/cow	154	153	148	162	155
Production/ha	304	366	343	381	417

Table 2 measures a 37% increase in production from first year in a discussion group to an average of six. Increased pasture utilization as measured by stocking rate would appear to be the biggest single factor involved in changing production.

Within this sample there were 33 farmers who had neither changed farms nor area and had joined a group either during or after the 1976-7 season. The average production of these farms prior to joining a group was 290 kg per survey ha. The average for all South Auckland farmers over the period of this survey had a seasonal range from 277 to 296 kg per survey ha (N.Z. Dairy Board Economic Survey 1977-8).

Between 45 and 50% of dairy farmers have some direct annual contact with management advisers. What of the 50% (8000 farmers) not using these services? Our experiences with unsolicited visits indicate that at least half of these would welcome extension people once the communication barrier has been broken down.