Agricultural Economics
U.N.E.
1958 1983
Silver Jubilee
Agricultural Economics in Australia
Correct Citation: Bearman, S. (ed.), *Agricultural Economics in Australia*, Department of Agricultural Economics & Business Management, University of New England, Armidale, 1985.

ISBN 0 85834 595 1

Photography: Vic Wright
Typesetting: Judy van Baal
Printed by the University of New England Printery and published by the Department of Agricultural Economics & Business Management, University of New England, 1985.

Copyright 1985
Agricultural Economics in Australia

Edited by Sally Bearman

Proceedings of a Symposium, September 23-25, 1983, to celebrate The Twenty-fifth Anniversary of Agricultural Economics at the University of New England, Armidale, Australia
The editor notes with regret the deaths of two distinguished contributors to these Proceedings: Emeritus Professor James P. Belshaw and Professor Sir John Crawford.
Contents

Welcome, Ronald C. Gates ......................... 7
Introductory Remarks, James P. Belshaw .......... 11
Origins and Early Days of the Department,
    Jack N. Lewis .................................. 15
Some Reflections on the Development of Agricultural
    Economics in Australia, Keith O. Campbell ...... 33
Agricultural Economics in the State Government Sector,
    Colin C. Gellatly ................................ 53
Agricultural Economics in Canberra, Geoff L. Miller ...... 67
Professional Interfaces and Impact of the Profession,
    John W. Freebairn ................................ 77
Agricultural Economics in Australia: Perspectives from
    Academe, Jock R. Anderson ....................... 89
A Future View from Professional Practice,
    Bruce J. Standen ............................... 101
How I Became an Agricultural Economist,
    John G. Crawford ................................ 109

Symposium Participants ............................... 117
Selected Apologies ................................. 123
Welcome

Professor Ronald C. Gates
Vice-Chancellor,
University of New England
Twenty-five years is a fair slice in the life of a University that has not yet quite reached the thirtieth anniversary of its coming out as an autonomous institution. Indeed, it can increasingly be said that agricultural economics in the University of New England is almost as old as the University itself; and, certainly, the history of the one is an important component in the history of the other – a theme that I am sure Jack Lewis will be able to elaborate on in the first session this morning.

My own knowledge runs to the recent past rather than to the early days; but, for the perspective, I can acknowledge with gratitude and pride the developments in teaching, research and service that have had their genesis in the Department – not least among which are the Agricultural Business Research Institute and the Australian Rural Adjustment Unit. I can testify, too, that agricultural economics is one of the fields for which this University is best and most favourably known in Australia and around the world.

Thus it is a special pleasure to welcome the alumni and friends of agricultural economics to this Silver Jubilee celebration. It is also a pleasure, if I may say so, to discover how many agricultural economists I am acquainted with. Though I am not an agricultural economist, I have a lively respect for those who are. It might even be said that I hold them in awe. It seems to me that their training lies at the rigorous end of the spectrum, that it addresses problems of the real world, at both the micro and the macro levels, and that it
equips them with the tools to solve problems of the real world.

One consequence is to be seen in the number of people with training and experience in agricultural economics who have gained respect and even eminence in other areas – applied welfare economics, taxation, regional input-output analysis, international trade, to name but a few. And to these one might, of course, add university administration; for in this University agricultural economics has supplied able and respected Deans and Chairmen of what is now called the Academic Board; and in this University I have had the good fortune to have John Dillon as Pro-Vice-Chancellor for three years and then to secure as his successor another who was trained in the mystery – John Naison.

I am not suggesting that all training in agricultural economics is equally productive of valuable skills and insights. Jack Lewis, in an engaging reminiscence that he wrote for our Convocation Bulletin three years ago, referred to the "decision to produce graduates who were basically economists, with specialised training in the economics of agriculture, rather than weak hybrids with a smattering of both agriculture and economics." Now hybrids, or so our agronomists and animal scientists tell, have their value. But surely in this case that original decision, to which I believe we remain true, was right for this University and right for the needs of this nation and indeed the world. The proof is to be found in the roles that our graduates perform, and in the sometimes embarrassing demand, from Australia and abroad, for the services of the staff of the Department.

A quarter of a century is long enough to generate traditions and legends. I am sure that this reunion will provide an occasion for them to be revived, swapped and added to – including, I would hope, in today's program of addresses and discussion. I trust that the scribes will be busy, for history and legend need to be recorded as well as made. And now I must let you get on with it. Again I bid you a warm welcome and, with pleasure and pride, I declare the Silver Jubilee Symposium open.
Introductory Remarks

Emeritus Professor James P. Belshaw
I think I first met Jack Lewis in 1951 or 1952 when he was a senior officer of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics.

I next met him at Harvard in January, 1953, when I was a very brief visitor there.

I think I met him again at the inauguration of Sir Barle Page as the first Chancellor of the newly established University of New England. On that occasion he was accompanied by the late Alf Maiden, a friend of both of us who had previously been a student at the New England University College before it became an autonomous degree-granting university in its own right. I have the very strong feeling that Jack Lewis was already looking at possible job prospects here since there was already talk at New England of establishing a faculty of agricultural economics. Indeed, such a faculty was established and Jack Lewis became the Foundation Professor of Agricultural Economics and Foundation Dean of the then Faculty of Agricultural Economics. He was highly qualified for those positions.

It was a sad day for me personally, and for the University of New England, when in 1970 Jack Lewis left New England for other pastures after pioneering agricultural economics here for thirteen years.

Under Jack Lewis' leadership and fostered by his ability, his enthusiasm, and his ideas, and greatly assisted by the
talented staff he was able to attract to New England, work in agricultural economics has brought the University of New England a fine national and international reputation.

Jack Lewis is to talk to you about the origins and early days of agricultural economics at New England. He is highly qualified to do that.

I cannot, however, resist the temptation to draw your attention to some of his other rather startling qualifications. Thus, the 1983 Who's Who in Australia lists his recreational interests as Indian cookery, sailing, Nordic skiing, and fun runs. You will agree with me that few other agricultural economists have had such qualifications.

Now it is my very great pleasure to formally introduce my old friend and colleague, Emeritus Professor J.N. Lewis, Doctor of Economics of the University of New England.
Origins and Early Days of the Department

Emeritus Professor Jack N. Lewis
By rights, perhaps, this Silver Jubilee Symposium should never have happened. For in May 1944 the conclusion was reached that "except for the fact that a University College is already in existence there, Armidale is not a suitable centre for the study of Rural Economy." At least that was the conclusion reached by a Committee of the University of Sydney Professorial Board, set up to consider a proposal from the Primary Producers Union for a faculty of rural economy at the New England University College.

Such a faculty had been a goal of the NEUC practically ever since its establishment in 1938. Its proponents originally did not have in mind a separate department or faculty of agricultural economics. Rural economy broadly comprehended basic agriculture, animal husbandry and practical farm management, with some introduction to related aspects of economics, accounting and rural law.

The Sydney Professorial Board's Committee was not convinced that such a course properly belonged in a university curriculum. It also felt that Armidale's location was unsuitable. The place, they held, was "representative of a comparatively small area – the Northern Tablelands – where the climatic and other conditions are quite different from those in our great agricultural and mixed farm region to the west of the mountains."

This must have incensed the Advisory Council of the
NBUC, which had seen clearly from the outset that Armidale's rural location gave it, in common with the other three million square miles or so of Australia outside the capital cities, a unique advantage for the pursuit of rural studies. In the end, however, the importance of dynamic elements in comparative advantage was manifested. Armidale alone amongst rural centres already had an established university-level institution.

The Sydney University Senate did not reach a decision on the proposal for rural economy but asked the Professorial Board to nominate a small committee to confer with representatives of the New England Advisory Council with a view to submitting a combined report at a later date. The Registrar, Mr W.A. Selle, wrote to Dr Edgar Booth, Warden of NBUC, on 28 June 1944 informing him that this committee had been appointed and consisted of the Deans of the Faculties of Agriculture, Veterinary Science and Economics. It was left in Dr Booth's hands to call the meeting with representatives of the NBUC Advisory Council. The meeting was never held, probably because the proposal was undergoing reformulation and ideas on the nature of the course or courses to be developed at Armidale were being radically changed at the time.

A broadsheet on "The Need for a Faculty of Agricultural Economics" was drafted during the second half of 1944 by Dr James Belshaw, Deputy Warden of the University College, and the Hon. D.H. Drummond, State Minister of Education at the time of its establishment. This was later issued as a White Paper. It not only presented the case for specialised teaching and research facilities in Australia but suggested the scope and nature of possible research projects and outlined a possible four-year course leading to a degree of bachelor of agricultural economics. It even tentatively suggested a teaching staff requirement of about ten persons including a professor and three other agricultural economists.

Clearly, therefore, Professor Belshaw provided most of the early thinking on the proposed development of agricultural economics at Armidale. More importantly he provided sustained initiative towards this development. Nothing can obscure that, except perhaps the tendency for the woodwork of any successful development to yield more staunch proponents in retrospect than may have been evident at the time.
One active and influential supporter of the proposal, however, was Mr J.G. Crawford, now Professor Sir John Crawford, the first Director of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics and previously Economist to the Rural Bank and Economic Adviser to the N.S.W. Department of Agriculture. Sir John is mentioned very early in the minutes of the Advisory Council as a person who might be able to help. He has been helping ever since. His most recent contribution has been the donation of his vast personal library collection to the J.N. Lewis Library in the Faculty of Economic Studies. This gift will be of invaluable assistance in building the Library as a major research resource.

In 1948, following appointment of Dr R.B. Madgwick as Warden of the University College, Sir John was asked to help guide the Advisory Council in its detailed planning for future agricultural economics courses. He developed recommendations for a teaching program and staffing which were revised and elaborated further in 1955, and taken into consideration along with those of Dr Belshaw.

In October 1948, in a memorandum to the Warden of the College, Dr Belshaw mentioned a long-run intention to travel overseas and examine teaching, research and extension programs in agricultural economics. He proposed visits to universities, government and inter-governmental agencies in the U.S.A., the United Kingdom and on the Continent. In 1952 he was awarded a joint Fulbright-Smith Mundt Fellowship to make this tour. The University College also provided him with a travel grant of about 1,000 pounds which came from a donation of 3,000 pounds, received from the Hon. D.H. Drummond for the development of rural economics. Dr Belshaw devoted his study leave to this project.

Before setting out, he had extensively canvassed, by personal visits and correspondence, the views of government bodies, banks and other institutions and individuals with an interest in the economics of agriculture. He regarded this as a necessary preliminary to his investigations overseas. As I recollect from one of his visits to the BAE, he was also promoting strongly not only the need for formal training programs in Australia but also the advantages of New England as a centre for their development.

I would like to be able to say that I warned him against the folly of proceeding with these plans but by the time we
met at Harvard, during his study tour, he had me sold on the proposal, although I never dreamed I would myself become involved.

On his return to Armidale Dr Belshaw submitted a detailed report on the programs and facilities of the various institutions he had visited. In this he developed detailed proposals and course outlines for a faculty of agricultural economics. This report was to become one of the basic working documents when the Faculty was set up a few years later.

Incidentally, during my examination of the limited archives material available on the background to the Faculty, I encountered a memorandum in which Dr Belshaw had defined the requirements for the Dean of a faculty of agricultural economics. It was important, he said, that the person selected "knows what agricultural economics is about, has a grasp of economic principles, has sufficient imagination to see the relationship between subjects, can get on with his staff in a reasonable way and is a competent administrator." Whether the person eventually appointed had all five of these essential attributes, I can't say. When I asked Professor Belshaw, he made some cryptic remark to the effect that three out of five is a pass but by no means a high distinction.

When the University of New England gained autonomy in 1954, its act of incorporation explicitly referred to the contemplated developments. The Act provided that "The University may establish such Faculties, Schools and Departments as are deemed desirable, including (a) a Faculty of Arts; (b) a Faculty of Science; (c) a Faculty of Animal Husbandry; and (d) a Faculty of Agricultural Economics."

The University proceeded immediately to establish the Faculty of Rural Science. An interim Faculty of Agricultural Economics was also set up. Staffing appointments were temporarily delayed, however, by lack of finance which obliged the Council at its first meeting to decide not to adopt a recommendation from the Vice-Chancellor, Dr Madgwick, urging that a professor of agricultural economics and a senior lecturer be added to the Faculty of Rural Science as soon as that Faculty was placed on an operational basis.

Dr Belshaw unsuccessfully urged the need to appoint staff during 1955 if teaching in agricultural economics were to
commence the following year. Although funds for the initial appointments were still lacking, the Council, in October 1955, decided to commence teaching in agricultural economics simultaneously with rural science in March 1956. The lead time proved quite insufficient to get adequate information out to schools and careers advisers in time to generate interest from school leavers. In February 1956 it was reported to the Council that, while enrolments in rural science were encouraging, only two applicants for admission to agricultural economics had materialised. The Council thereupon rescinded the decision to commence tuition of agricultural economics in 1956. One of the two seeking enrolment, Don Muir, a Dookie Agricultural College diplomate, took a job with CSIRO to tide him over until the actual launching of the degree course two years later. This firmly establishes his claim to have been the Faculty's first undergraduate student.

A grant of 20,000 pounds from the Rural Credits Development Fund had at this time been approved by the Commonwealth Bank (subsequently the Reserve Bank) to finance research in agricultural economics at the University of New England. The research envisaged was strongly biased towards the comparative approach, with the wording of the announcement pointing to farm surveys and record-keeping studies to discover factors influencing the profitability of farming. An approach was made to the Bank to see whether, in order to let the Faculty come into existence without further delay, this 20,000 pounds could be used instead to meet the salaries of a professor and a senior lecturer for an initial four-year period. The Bank consented on condition that the University would itself, thereafter, maintain the development and would provide some funds for research.

Those who chronicle the history of agricultural economics in Australia cannot fail to observe the crucial part played by the Reserve Bank's Rural Credits Development Fund. The Bank had already made a grant of 50,000 pounds to the University of Sydney in 1948 to establish the first Chair of Agricultural Economics in Australia. Grants had also been made to the University of Western Australia to establish a temporary Research Fellowship and subsequently a permanent Readership in Agricultural Economics there. This vital support probably owed something to the interests of the Bank's Governor, Dr H.C. Coombs, Director General of Postwar Reconstruction when the BAB was established. Another favourable factor was, I believe, the presence in the Bank's
Rural Liaison Service of two of Australia's early agricultural economists, Alan McIntyre and Ira Butler.

Financial problems had thus foiled the University of New England's aspirations to be the first Australian university to offer a program in agricultural economics. By the time Armidale opened for business, major teaching and research programs were already operating within Faculties of Agriculture or Agricultural Science in Sydney and Western Australia and in the Faculty of Economics at the University of Adelaide.

Armidale's Chair of Agricultural Economics was advertised in October 1956 and I was notified of my appointment the following April. On my way up the driveway to take up duty in July 1957, I encountered the Vice-Chancellor with the Murray Committee and entourage in tow. Sir Keith Murray, a pioneer British agricultural economist, had been commissioned by the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies, to report on the financial needs of Australian universities - an important turning point in their postwar development, incidentally. He asked me where I had received my postgraduate training. "At Harvard, with John D. Black," I proudly replied. Sir Keith, Cornell trained, registered deep disappointment. "Pity!" he said.

Before my arrival, applications had been received for a lecturer/senior lecturer in farm management. To the astonishment of another leading British agricultural economist, who afterwards told me he failed to see why we needed a virtuoso in linear programming for the Colonies, we appointed Will Candler, a recent Ph.D. from Iowa State College, to the post. Will was to make an enormous contribution to the development of tuition in production economics and economic statistics during the four years or so before he departed to take up the Chair of Agricultural Economics at Massey. His total incapacity for diplomacy, his youthful impatience to set the world right and his uncompromising belief in the relevance of production economics principles even in university management ruffled not a few feathers. His particular bête noire was the University farm, which was subject at that time to some lack of clarity concerning its primary role. Some saw it as a means of reducing the University dining hall's dependence upon the market for its supplies of perishable foodstuffs. Will tended to see this function as inconsistent with its research and teaching
role. He claimed to have a supporter in the Research Fellow in Poultry Science who, one morning, found some of his experimental eggs being moved into consumption.

In September 1957, I recommended to the Professorial Board that tuition of the four-year degree course begin in 1958. This was adopted and confirmed by Council and in our first year twelve students enrolled for the course. Keith Campbell expressed some alarm at these numbers and spoke darkly of saturating the market. We were also pleased that the catchment area for the twelve included five states and the A.C.T. This encouraged our hopes of developing into a national and not merely a regional school.

It was said around the University campus that the only way of keeping anything secret at UNE was to give it to the Publicity Officer, Dr Eric Edwards. I know this criticism was grossly unfair as we were getting regular feedback from his P.R. efforts on our behalf - mostly letters from Keith Campbell complaining that our press releases were misleadingly suggesting that UNE had the sole distributing rights to agricultural economics in Australia. I also had to remind the Publicity Officer several times that I was not Australia's first Professor of Agricultural Economics. Apart from such minor over-statements, Dr Edwards did a commendable job for us.

We had few worries about over-supply of graduates. The New England course was not narrowly vocational and was designed to equip graduates for a wide range of careers both within and outside the agricultural sector. Both Jim Belshaw and Sir John Crawford had advocated course structures seeking to produce graduates, who were basically economists, with specialised training in the economics of agriculture and some emphasis on quantitative analytical techniques, rather than weak hybrids with a smattering of both agriculture and economics. It proved a sound approach. We were able later to supplement it with the postgraduate diploma course for those with a first degree in agriculture or rural science.

It did at the time, however, come in for some criticism from my former colleague in the BAB, Dr Tom Strong. Tom held that the only satisfactory way of training an agricultural economist was a double degree, super-imposing a course in economics on an agricultural science degree. He exchanged a series of letters on the subject with me in the pages of the
Queensland Country Life. After some weeks of this I was encouraged to receive a letter from Keith Campbell, informing me that he and several of our professional colleagues felt they could stay out of the debate no longer. They were coming in on my side. I eagerly turned to the Queensland Country Life next week. It carried a letter which began by stating that Dr Strong's ideas on the training of agricultural economists were even more dangerous than those of Lewis.

Eventually we were to be very pleased to merge with economics in the Faculty of Economic Studies. However, in the beginning, I'm sure, we moved faster towards the kind of course desired by virtue of our existence as a separate faculty. Universities are rather conservative places and academic developments are sometimes influenced by fears for vested interests. If we had started as part of an existing faculty, we might well have had to compromise far short of what an agricultural economist needs in order to have a working and not just a nodding acquaintance with his subject.

One expedient, which ran counter to all I had learned from John D. Black, was to establish for a time a separate Department of Farm Management. We realized that this could have been divisive and that it unduly compartmentalised staff resources. However, it was unavoidable if we were to achieve a staffing establishment commensurate with our teaching responsibilities and to enjoy a better ratio of senior to junior staff than was possible under the inflexible rule, then current, of one professor per department.

There was some headshaking on the Arts side of the campus on the arrival of agricultural economics. This concern was eloquently expressed or reported in an article by Gwen Kelly, wife of a Classics Department staff member. The article lamented the decline in traditional university values in Australia. It went on to ask (or perhaps merely to voice the ultimate disillusionment of university staff): "But what would you expect? It was the days of Agricultural Economics."

Incidentally I note that the academic Doomsday prophets are still at it. I recently had a short note entitled "Recollections of Agricultural Economics" published in the UNB's Convocation Bulletin. On the facing page was a headlined warning from the Professor of Classics, John Bishop, "Once a university yields to political pressure to introduce
'useful' courses, it is but a short step to the exercise of another and more deadly pressure."

My inaugural lecture in 1958 was entitled Confessions of a Farm Economist. Although it was extracted from me under duress I'm not about to recant and disown it. What it confessed was not my own misdeeds but simply the fact that in a number of overseas centres, agricultural economists enjoyed an unmerited popularity with their farmer clientele, despite frittering away their time in naive empiricism. Comparative studies, seeking to derive rules for successful farming by statistical agitation of data from farm surveys or record books, had proved a fruitless boondoggle, yielding little guidance to farmers as to what they should do to improve their economic performance. At New England, I suggested, we would do better to adopt a conditional normative approach using such tools as budgeting and linear programming, despite the fact that our grant from the Bank specified research to discover the factors determining profitability.

Moreover, I made clear that we would reject attempts to cast agricultural economics in the limited role implied in the normal physical and biological scientist's view of the agricultural research, development and extension process. In this view, agricultural economics is simply a form of cost accounting allowing those innovations which will pay the farmer to become certified practices for extension workers to peddle. The threat to agricultural economics perceived in the widespread currency of this viewpoint in CSIRO, departments of agriculture, research-funding bodies and universities themselves was what led me to select this uncharacteristic subject-matter. I have often wondered since whether in so doing I over-reacted to the preconceptions encountered on my arrival in Armidale. However, I confess that twenty-four years later I still judged it necessary, in briefing the ACIAR Advisory Council on the capabilities and strengths of Australian agricultural economics, to warn of the same misguided notions. Moreover, having since visited several underdeveloped countries, where the development of agricultural economics is held back by a preoccupation with cost surveys, wrongly purported to be a source of valuable farm management information, I am somewhat less ashamed of my inaugural lecture than I used to be.

Amongst other early teaching appointments were Rob Pearse, Eric Waring, Warren Musgrave, John van der Meulen,
Doug McConnell and Jack Duloy. Rob Pearse joined us at the end of 1958 to teach the introductory farm management course, encompassing farm accounts and budgeting and acquainting students with comparative studies. He and Eric Waring, who transferred across from the Agronomy Department in 1960, encouraged, and developed links with, local farm-improvement clubs. They were jointly responsible for launching the University's Farm Management Service Centre, the forerunner to the Agricultural Business Research Institute. Rob also promoted the development of standard farm accounting conventions and took the initiative in securing the grant for a temporary Research Fellowship in this field from the Rural Credits Development Fund.

Jack Duloy was originally appointed to teach agricultural economics but assumed responsibility for economic statistics in order to maintain tuition in this subject after Will Candler's departure. Whereas Will had a sizeable dose of experimental design in the course, Jack gradually shifted the emphasis towards econometrics.

John van der Meulen taught the first course offered at New England in agricultural marketing. It incorporated a strong strand of demand analysis. Van der Meulen was instrumental in obtaining funds for a research fellowship in banana marketing from the Banana Growers Federation. He also took it on himself to conduct an appeal amongst agribusiness firms and financial institutions to obtain the funds to purchase journals and monographs for the Faculty's Seminar Library.

At a conference in Coffs Harbour conducted by the University's Department of Adult Education, van der Meulen revealed that the main content of a 15,000 pounds report from the BGF's consultants was already available free of charge in an article of his published in the Review of Marketing and Agricultural Economics some time previously. He rather warmed to his subject and I heard the Chairman of the BGF behind me say somewhat apprehensively "He'll be on about the new case next."

At that moment van der Meulen roared "And as for the new case, it's a disaster." It appeared that on switching from timber to cardboard cases, the BGF had chosen one retaining the same dimensions as the old wooden case, whereas the new material really called for a marked reduction in the height of
the side walls so as to allow stacking without bruising of the fruit and to provide an attractive display case at point of sale. Fortunately the BGF was a body with a long-standing interest in marketing and a firm belief in the benefits of research. They generously gave us our grant.

Warren Musgrave is best known to former students for his rigorous presentation of the core course in production economics for many years and for a critical evaluation of linear programming in senior years. He subsequently demonstrated the value of a sabbatical year in Michigan by attracting a million dollar grant to establish the Rural Adjustment Unit.

I'm going to desist at this point and not outline the many contributions of other members of the teaching staff such as Ross Parish, who was appointed Associate Professor in 1963, John Dillon, who came as Foundation Professor of Farm Management the following year, Ian Sturgess, who took over Parish's course in agricultural marketing, or Tak Takayama, our first Professor of Economic Statistics. Nor do I have time to describe the work of the early research fellows including Bernard James, Alistair Watson and Tony Chisholm or the numerous others who served as research assistants and teaching fellows. I can merely mention but not review the achievements and contributions of the many other members of the teaching staff who helped the Department to win and uphold its standing in the Australian profession and overseas – such men as Gwyn James, Roy Powell, Jack Sinden, Brian Hardaker, Jack Makeham and Jock Anderson, none of whom are exactly newcomers to Armidale.

The Department also had a number of distinguished visitors who contributed to its development during its early years. Bill Herr from the University of Southern Illinois spent two years with us in the early 1960s. Maurice Kelso taught our first course in natural resource economics. Al Halter helped John Dillon identify New England with decision-making studies and Barry Dent found a receptive audience here for systems analysis.

One man I must mention, however, is Arthur Rickards, whose entrepreneurial capacity, salesmanship and computing skills put ABRI on an efficient self-sustaining basis after previous difficulties in getting it up and going. Another is John Quilkey, originally Research Fellow in Rice Marketing
but soon pressed into substantial teaching duties, including supervision of the final-year Research Seminar, a unit important in making New England graduates ready to go out as practitioners.

Finally, of course, it is imperative to acknowledge the great contribution of our support staff. Mrs Joan Plumley, departmental secretary for many years used to help me into my gown and impel me in the direction of the lecture room when it was time for me to be on my way. I resisted this only once. "I can find my way into my gown, myself," I snapped. "I'm not quite doddering yet." The following day she burst in about twenty minutes after my appointment with my students was due to begin and affected great surprise. "Oh! I thought you were away lecturing," she said. I grabbed my gown and raced across to the lecture room, only to see the last of the class disappearing over the hill on their way back to the Union.

From the beginning the Seminar Library was an extremely valuable teaching resource. It also afforded students a quiet, congenial place to work between classes. While funds for journal subscriptions and other accessions had to come from external sources, the University generously added a library assistant to our staffing establishment. That the Seminar Library served us so well in those early days was due largely to the enthusiasm and helpful personalities of its successive custodians, Miss Ilona Eberle, Mrs Phil Hughes and Mrs Pat Eberle.

For some years after its establishment, the Department's physical facilities and staff study accommodation were rather cramped and inadequate. My wife and I once used to sail a four-berth cruising yacht off the South Coast of England. An unkind reviewer once wrote of it: "This vessel offers comfort for one, intimacy for two, tenseness for three and bitter hostility for four." Well all I can say is that compared to the initial quarters of the Faculty of Agricultural Economics, the accommodation on that boat was palatial. For the first year or so Will Candler and I shared a tiny room in the temporary Rural Science hut with the Physiology Department's white mice, which I personally found less distracting than a room-mate pounding away at a Simplex solution on an ancient Marchant calculator. Our research assistant, Tom Harris, and the BAE postgraduate scholar that year, Peter Dixon, were housed nearby in an unlined shed where rats developed a taste for the insulated power cables on their one-bar radiators.
By the time the Rural Science building, originally intended to include permanent accommodation for Agricultural Economics, was completed, the growth of our sister faculty had pre-empted all but five staff studies in the East Wing. These were barely sufficient to house the other members of our extended family, namely the teaching staff in Rural Sociology, Economic Statistics and Public Administration. We did gain, however, a lecture room, seminar room and a small statistics laboratory.

Not until 1964 was the first stage of an Agricultural Economics building to be completed. A sum of 25,000 pounds for this purpose was included in the building program for that triennium. Even to get that much we had to resort to every tactic open to an infant department - wheeling, tear shedding, tantrums and threats to leave home. The actual cost was to run to about 40,000 pounds. It was to be two more triennia before the addition of two further small stages to the building enabled all outlying members of the Department to be brought in from Siberia. At the time we resented the view that there were more pressing things on the building agenda, especially the refurbishment of "Trevenna" and the indulging of ill-placed high-table aspirations in the College system, but although the capital grants for building increased greatly during this period, it was also a period of very rapid growth in total enrolments. Moreover, the destruction by fire of the Belshaw building in 1958 administered a major setback. Our hopes of securing an early improvement in accommodation sank with the news that, as the students put it, Belshaw had done his block.

Staff and graduate students, including those from related sub-departments, used to meet over coffee in a small room in the temporary office block west of Rural Science. It had no running water and a few cases of hepatitis sent us scrambling to secure a coffee-bar dispenser with paper cups. A small refrigerator was successfully requisitioned by Jack Duloy as "indispensable for preservation of his computer tapes". I'm sure that sharing the one common room for all helped immeasurably in promoting good working relationships and in fostering the ideal of a community of scholars.

The location of the Agricultural Economics and Economics Departments on opposite sides of the campus at that time, did, however, present some problems. The lack of physical proximity tended at times to attenuate other links,
despite attempts to overcome the problem by such means as regular joint staff seminars.

Not surprisingly, much of the early research endeavour was directed to the economics of pasture improvement, the most important technological advance taking place in Australian agriculture at that time. Rob Pearse, Tony Chisholm and others worked on the capital stresses and stocking adjustment problems faced in carrying through a program of pasture improvement. Jack Duloy and Ross Parish contributed significantly to the appraisal of wool-marketing proposals in the run-up to the 1965 referendum of woolgrowers. Maladjustments in the dairy industry and the economics of irrigated crops also commanded considerable attention as did meat and banana marketing and wheat stabilisation.

In common with their colleagues in other universities, New England's agricultural economists were not noted at this time for a low profile on controversial issues of public policy. There was never, however, any attempt on the part of the University authorities to curb this involvement. I once met the Chancellor, Dr P.A. Wright, in Beardy Street. He said "I see you've had a mention in Queensland Country Life. Keep up the good work; its all good publicity." I was taken aback later to discover he had been referring to an attack on me in which my adversary alleged that "the old professor was hopelessly muddled, incompetent and confused." Incidentally I wrote off at once objecting to that epithet "old".

On another occasion the Vice-Chancellor, Bert Madgwick, carpeted me for becoming involved during his absence in a front-page disagreement on university finance with Senator John Gorton, then Commonwealth Minister in charge of Education. "Never do that again," said Dr Madgwick, "but if you must, talk to me first. I could have helped you." Such incidents indicated that fears about the erosion of traditional university values, arising from the insidious influence of agricultural economics, may have been somewhat misplaced.

Another feature of life in the Department's early existence was our participation in university extension activities. This involved staff in some hair-raising travel on indifferent roads. We had tried hard to get our lecturers not to face the blackboard when addressing the class; it was a little disconcerting to find some of them adopting the same
stance in relation to their back-seat passengers. I've been reminded recently of my occasional departure from impassivity as a passenger: Bernard James claims that, despite my prediction he'd be lucky not to write off his car in six months on Australian dirt roads (an opinion expressed after sharing an 180-degree skid with him), his experience on the far more demanding snow-covered roads of East Anglia has served him well and he's still driving his own panel van with 200,000 miles behind him.

There were other dangers on these trips. I recall travelling to a Rural Science School at Wellington with Eric Waring and a couple of rural scientists. Eric confessed he hadn't yet worked out what to say beyond his opening joke. He was prevailed upon to tell this. Then to Eric's utter dismay, one of his rural scientist companions, who preceded him on the program, stood up and commenced his presentation with the joke. It only goes to show that Cornell-trained economists are not the only people never to be trusted.

I regret in these recollections I haven't said much about the undergraduate students. If I get started on anecdotes about students, I might not know where to stop. The Department certainly attracted some very anecdote-worthy individuals.

A year or so ago I had a discussion with Warren Musgrave in which we speculated how the Department of Agricultural Economics at New England had come to succeed so far beyond all early expectations and had won for itself such an enviable reputation in Australia and overseas. Warren hypothesised, and I had to concur, that the main reason was simply sheer good fortune in the students who came to us. If you look back at the composition of the classes we had in those early days, and trace their postgraduate careers, the conclusion is inescapable that the intake must have been significantly different in some important respects from the average university entry.

The student body in each faculty of a university tends to shape its own behaviour code and set of values to a large extent independently of the staff. The group attitudes which grew up amongst Ag Eco students at Armidale led them at times to play rather hard (despite the examples of their mentors). It somehow did not impede the development of a professional pride, a sense of purpose and a confidence in their
own capacity, at a minimum, to cope as well as their instructors. The high standing of the Department undeniably stems mainly from the impact of its graduates.

For staff members, those years were an exciting and intensely fulfilling experience. I've been lucky enough twice in my career to be around when a new institution in agricultural economics was launched. The first was the Bureau of Agricultural Economics in Canberra after the War. In both cases staff members felt they were engaged in doing something very worthwhile, which lightened any temporary frustrations or difficulties experienced. They were still well down the learning curve, where *deja vu* and red tape had not yet been encountered.

I'm glad I was there in the first decade of the Department. Notwithstanding attempts in some quarters to suggest that while all this early action was taking place, I was far away raising goats in the Punjab, I was indeed there. I'm also glad that throughout those formative but sometimes difficult years, the Department continued to receive the unwavering support of its founder - the man who conceived the whole idea, who campaigned for many years to see it born, and who earlier from 1938 onwards had also pioneered economics at the New England University College.
Some Reflections on the Development of Agricultural Economics in Australia

Professor Keith O. Campbell
Head, Department of Agricultural Economics,
University of Sydney
In this paper I propose to discuss some of the principal factors which have helped to shape the discipline of agricultural economics in Australia. My approach on this occasion will not be strictly chronological. I seek rather to identify and assess the influence which individuals, institutions and changes in the social and economic climate have had on the form and timing of the development that occurred.

Patrons and Sponsors before 1945

First let me refer to those early patrons and sponsors who took steps to foster the development of agricultural economics in this country. Typically such people possessed no formal training in agricultural economics but, as a result of their experiences, observations or the positions they held, they became so convinced of the need to initiate specific work in this area that they positively tried to attract others to their point of view. In most cases they made appropriate representations in a political context. In a few instances, where they had command of resources or had access to them, they engaged staff to offer lecture courses which purported to be in the field and/or to undertake research which had some economic orientation.

In the history of Australian agricultural economics, as in the history of the discipline in other countries, sponsors were principally to be found among agricultural technologists on the one hand and among economists on the other. Less frequently
farmers or professional societies played a role.

(a) Scientists as sponsors

In the agricultural category in Australia there were people like S.M. Wadham at the University of Melbourne, B.J. Underwood at the Institute of Agriculture in Western Australia and to a lesser extent A.E.V. Richardson at the Waite Institute. At the University of Sydney, R.D. Watts included a course, entitled "Economic Science Applied to Agriculture", in the initial curriculum in agricultural science in 1910 but specific examination results in agricultural economics did not appear until 1923. At the agricultural colleges, B.A. Southey offered courses at Hawkesbury which were claimed to have some economic content. A.R. Callaghan as Principal of the Roseworthy College was responsible for establishing a teaching post in agricultural economics at that College in 1946.

Support for the initiation of research in agricultural economics also came unexpectedly from members of the veterinary profession and subsequently, through them, the Australian scientific establishment. In 1940 a plan for an "Institute of Agricultural Economics" was drawn up by Ian Clunies Ross, R.M.C. Gunn, H.R. Carne and D.A. Gill of the Faculty of Veterinary Science at the University of Sydney with the assistance of L.C. Holmes of the Economic Department of the Bank of New South Wales. As one who knew all these people, I would hazard a guess that Clunies Ross was the prime mover.1 This committee's proposal was later taken up and supported by the Australian National Research Council (the forerunner of the Australian Academy of Science) of which Carne was the Secretary at the time. The then Chairman of ANRC, Eric Ashby (a botanist), and Clunies Ross later presented the proposal to the Standing Committee of the Australian Agricultural Council but received no

---

encouragement. Subsequently the ANRC plan was put before the executive of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, again without success. Later representations of a similar kind were placed before the CSIR executive by the CSIR State Committee in Western Australia as well as by the A.C.T. Branch of the Australian Institute of Agricultural Science. In all cases the proposal was given short shrift as the executive was determined not to let the Council become embroiled in possible political controversy.

Finally the ANRC, in conjunction with the Vice-Chancellors of the Australian universities, held a conference in Melbourne in July 1941 to discuss the training of agricultural economists in a university context. The recommendations of the conference went to the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee which in turn sought financial help from the Commonwealth Government to implement the proposal. However, the deteriorating war situation led to indefinite deferment of any decision to support the idea.

(b) Economists as sponsors

When one comes to general economists who sponsored or in some cases undertook applied work in the agricultural industries, the name of J.G. Crawford is well to the fore. Following upon earlier ad hoc arrangements to provide an economics course for students in the Faculty of Agriculture, Crawford was appointed a part-time lecturer in agricultural economics in the University of Sydney in 1934. From his base as economic adviser to the Rural Bank of New South Wales

---

2. It is worthy of note that both Clunies Ross and Ashby at later stages of their careers tried to dissociate themselves from economists and economic research. See Keith O. Campbell, "Agricultural Economics - The Cinderella of the Agricultural Sciences", in Commonwealth Agricultural Bureaux, Perspectives in World Agriculture, Farnham Royal, Slough, 1980, pp. 478 and 480.

3. This was not the first time that proposals that the CSIR undertake economic research did not find favour with the Executive. For details, see C.B. Schedvin's forthcoming history of the CSIRO.
after 1935, and through his membership of interdepartmental committees, he was able by 1941 to convince the then Premier of the State, W.J. McKell, and others of the need to establish an agricultural economics group in the N.S.W. Department of Agriculture. Following Crawford's secondment to the rural section of the Commonwealth Department of War Organization in 1942, he was influential in the transference of some of the staff he assembled there to the Department of Postwar Reconstruction and later to the Bureau of Agricultural Economics of which he became the first Director.

On various university campuses around the country there were a number of economists who from time to time ventured into analyses of rural economic policies. Isles and Ramsay at Adelaide and Giblin and Copland at Melbourne were examples. Later Belshaw, the first appointee in economics at the New England University College, played an important role in helping to get the Faculty of Agricultural Economics started there.

Before World War II, a number of the economists in the banks were instrumental in directing some of their staff to undertake work relevant to the rural industries. C.V. Janes at the Bank of N.S.W. was one and, as mentioned earlier, Crawford at the Rural Bank was another. From a broader international perspective, Colin Clark's work at the Queensland Bureau of Industry should not be overlooked.

(c) Lay-support

The most clearcut case where lay-support for the development of agricultural economics was apparent was in relation to the University of New England. The movement to get a "faculty of rural economy" established at the then New England University College became evident from about 1943 onwards. There had been talk of faculties of agriculture and veterinary science in the course of negotiations to establish the College in 1937. Fred Whitehouse, at the time lecturer in animal husbandry in the Faculty of Veterinary Science of the University of Sydney, had made a submission to the Rural Reconstruction Commission advocating initially that

---

4. D.H. Drummond, A University is Born, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1959, p. 28.
courses in rural economy be established at three centres in New South Wales. Later his interest narrowed to one of promoting the New England course. Subsequently J.P. Beelshaw joined forces with the Hon. D.H. Drummond, a prominent New England member of the N.S.W. Parliament, a former Minister for Education and a great supporter of the New England University College, to prepare a broadsheet advocating the establishment of a faculty of rural economy at Armidale. The issue of autonomy for the College (it was then a college of the University of Sydney) and the proposal to establish tertiary courses in "rural economy" there became an important subsidiary objective of the so-called "New State Movement". As a result of the politicisation of the issue, an increasing number of lay people including graziers such as H.F. White and P.A. Wright became involved. The Council of the N.S.W. Graziers' Association and other representative groups passed resolutions in favour of the proposal.  

At the time there was great confusion about the form of the proposed new faculty - whether the emphasis was to be on general agriculture, animal husbandry or agricultural economics. (The Sydney course in agricultural science at that time contained virtually no animal husbandry.) From a letter in the Sydney University archives, it would seem that to Whitehouse "rural economy" referred to a general farm-oriented course covering both crops and livestock conducted in a rural setting. In short, the term "rural economy" was being used in the Oxford tradition as a synonym for agriculture in general. In the same letter Whitehouse complained that other people "in their scheme [were]...putting a city vision into a country environment."

Wright, Whitehouse and others put great emphasis on the need to locate the proposed faculty in a rural environment. Graduates in agricultural science from Sydney University will be interested in Whitehouse's denigration of the rural faculties at the University. In a letter to the Sydney Morning Herald, he expressed the view that

5. Letter to the Editor, Sydney Morning Herald from Phillip A. Wright, 2 December 1943.

if the recruit is from a city man's home, he is in urgent need of practical farm and station experience and divorcement from this throws undue emphasis on classroom and laboratory whence the graduate emerges as a test tube petri dish product only of value nationally in small correctly dispensed doses.7

Drummond for his part was also confused. Writing as late as 1958 (i.e. well after Belshaw had reported on overseas developments in agricultural economics and Jack Lewis had taken up his appointment at Armidale), he says that he had noted with dismay that neither at home or abroad was there any very clear perception of what the content of an effective curriculum [in agricultural economics] should be. In Great Britain it appeared to be mainly a kind of a technical course in the marketing of primary products. In the United States it seemed to be a weird collection of subjects thrown together and to an extent the whole idea was in danger of being utterly discredited.8

Moreover Drummond cited Edmund de Brunner, a rural sociologist from Columbia University, as being the only man he had met to date "who had really grasped the true principles to be applied in a study of problems in this long neglected field."9

Institutionalisation of Agricultural Economics in the Universities

By mid-1946, bureaux or divisions specifically committed to research in agricultural economics had been established at commonwealth and state levels - the Bureau of Agricultural Economics in Canberra in July 1946 and the Division of Agricultural Economics in New South Wales in October 1941. Other state departments of agriculture were to emulate the

9. *ibid.*
N.S.W. example in the years that followed.

However, irrespective of efforts which may be mounted to get new disciplines accepted in government bureaucracies, historians of science tend to regard the establishment of a new discipline in a university context as being of particular importance. The sociologist, Terry Clark, for instance says that "entrance of an innovation [that is, a new field] into the university is in most cases, the single most decisive stage in the overall institutionalization process."10 There are a number of reasons why this is so. Especially relevant in the Australian case is the assurance it provides of a continuing source of new recruits for the field in the form of students. Appointees to university posts are able to devote more undivided attention to promoting their subject. The prestige and legitimacy of the subject is enhanced and, what is especially important in the social sciences, the tradition of academic freedom in the universities gives protection if current shibboleths are being questioned.

In the Australian scene, the role of the Commonwealth (now Reserve) Bank (through the medium of its Rural Credits Development Fund) in making possible the entry of agricultural economics into academia is without parallel in this country and indeed possibly without parallel in the world. The Bank's traditional pattern is to make selected grants in support of agricultural research projects annually, after consideration of applications from research bodies. But in 1948, the Bank itself took the initiative and offered the Senate of the University of Sydney 50,000 pounds to establish a chair in agricultural economics. This offer to fund the establishment of the first Australian chair in the subject (and incidentally the first permanent university appointment in the discipline) stands as the largest single grant ever made from the Rural Credits Development Fund. The Bank executives deemed it advisable to forewarn the Prime Minister of the Bank's intended use of RCDF money for this purpose. It is of interest that it was a stipulation of the grant that the chair was to be established "firstly, to enable original research to be

undertaken in the field of agricultural economics and secondly to ensure that the results of such research should be disseminated as widely as possible and made available for the benefit of all agricultural interests in Australia." It was recognised by the Bank from the outset that RCDF monies were to be used to help promote undergraduate and postgraduate teaching as well as research.  

Though an appointment was not made at Sydney until 1951, the germ of the idea went back to 1945. Early that year, L.G. Melville, who was then the Bank's economist and L.P. Giblin, who hailed from the University of Melbourne and had been a member of the Commonwealth Bank Board from 1935 to 1942, jointly prepared the case for making the offer for such a chair. Among those consulted were Rivett and Richardson of the CSIR executive, both of whom strongly supported the idea. (The irony of their support after their refusal to provide a home for agricultural economics in the CSIR fold will not escape notice.) Others consulted were R.C. Mills, Professor of Economics at the University of Sydney, who was at the time seconded to the Commonwealth Government as Chairman of the Universities' Commission, S.H. Roberts, Vice-Chancellor of Sydney University, and J.G. Crawford, then in the Department of Postwar Reconstruction.

The decision to endow the chair at Sydney was made on 5 November 1945, but the Bank did not make a formal offer to the University Senate until September 1948, primarily, it would appear, because ready cash was not available in the Rural Credits Development Fund. The offer when made was accepted by the Senate which further determined that the chair should be at the University of Sydney itself, rather than at the New England University College and in the Faculty of


12. The information in this and the following two paragraphs is drawn from R.W. Prunster and J. Melville, *The Rural Credits Development Fund 1925-74* (unpublished manuscript held by the Reserve Bank of Australia).
Agriculture rather than in the Faculty of Economics. In view of the earlier advocacy of rural developments at Armidale previously mentioned, the protests from that city were loud and clear particularly from the new Warden, R.B. Madgwick, and from the Chairman of the Advisory Council, the Rt Hon. Sir Earle Page.

The offer to the University of Sydney, and its magnitude, did not escape the notice of the faculties of agriculture and of economics in other universities and may even have been a little embarrassing to the Bank itself, given its desire for evenhandedness between the states. In 1956, after the Bank had indicated its willingness to accept proposals for "major projects", it made a grant of 3,000 pounds per year for five years to assist in the establishment of a readership in agricultural economics at the University of Western Australia and 5,000 pounds for four years to the University of New England to "undertake a study of the comparative efficiency of individual farms in the dairying, beef cattle, sheep and poultry industries." In the event, the New England money initially went towards academic appointments. In 1958, 17,000 pounds was made available to the University of Melbourne to help it develop a teaching and research unit in agricultural economics and in 1959 15,000 pounds was allocated to the University of Adelaide to establish a readership in the field. Finally in 1962, Monash University was given 20,000 pounds to help it establish a chair in agricultural economics.

New or additional staff appointments at universities became somewhat easier following the Commonwealth Government's entry into university financing in the wake of the report of the Murray Committee on Australian Universities in 1957. But it is clear that without the initiative of the Commonwealth Bank and its successor, the Reserve Bank, the discipline of agricultural economics would never have made the progress it did in Australia in the decade of the

13. This was apparently a deliberate decision. Until 1951, the part-time lecturers in agricultural economics were supplied by the Faculty of Economics. I once asked S.J. Butlin, then Dean of the Faculty of Economics, why the chair was established in the Faculty of Agriculture rather than in the Faculty of Economics. His cryptic response was "Others were closer to the throne than I was."
fifties. Appointments would have been delayed and probably would have been made at a more junior level in the absence of the Bank's assistance. In multi-disciplinary faculties of agriculture, the going is hard at any time for claims with respect to the social sciences.14

In addition to their pump-priming role in relation to appointments to academic positions, the administrators of the Rural Credits Development Fund also funded numerous specific research projects in agricultural economics and thereby incidentally aided postgraduate training in the field. These grants were particularly helpful in that those responsible for disbursing industry research funds were not fully appreciative of the possible contribution of agricultural economics research to their industry and tended to support projects in production research over those having an economic or marketing orientation. To give two illustrations: in response to a request of mine to the Wheat Industry Council in the mid-fifties for support of a project to investigate the economics of wheat storage, I was told that farmers were not interested in storing wheat but only in selling it! About the same time a request directed to the wool industry committee for help for a study of complementarity between sheep and cattle production led to a comment that the project proposed was a problem in ecology rather than in economics and an offer to pay half the costs if the Meat Board paid the other half!

Professional Activities

After the establishment of centres of teaching and research in universities, probably the next most important element in securing a firm foundation for a disciplinary innovation is the formation of a national professional organisation. Such an organisation helps to maintain and develop intellectual standards through conferences, the establishment of journals, and the awarding of prizes. It is of particular value to small, often isolated, professional individuals or groups in a continent burdened with the tyranny of distance. Such a body may also provide a base for collective action by people from various universities on

matters of concern to the profession nationally. In short, the reference point is national and universal rather than confined to the individual research organisations, be they academic or bureaucratic.

In Australia, the initial steps to form what was to become the Australian Agricultural Economics Society were taken in the latter part of 1956. A conference of people interested in the field was called in Sydney in February 1957 and it attracted 120 participants who agreed to the establishment of the society. Arrangements were made to publish a journal forthwith, the papers read at the aforementioned conference forming the first issue of the *Australian Journal of Agricultural Economics*. Initially, as might be expected, the refereeing of journal articles was minimal but, with the passage of the years, the process of peer review gradually raised the journal's standards. The membership of the Society likewise gradually became more professional over time.

Where a new discipline is not of indigenous origin, the contacts with counterpart and earlier established research centres and professional bodies in other countries can play an important role in shaping the emerging science in the country in question. The umbilical cord is primarily made up of the postgraduate students who are trained in overseas institutions before and immediately following the institutionalisation of the discipline in the new country. In this regard Australian agricultural economics has benefited from its relatively late development in the sense that it has had the opportunity to benefit from other countries' mistakes. It was also fortunate in the range of overseas institutions (more particularly in the United States) to which would-be Australian practitioners went to study. Though there have been assertions that graduates of particular American institutions have had an undue influence on Australian agricultural economics, I agree with Edwards and Watson that these assertions are not borne

out by the facts.16

Overseas professional connections are probably less significant in shaping local developments than the personal contacts of individuals. Nevertheless it is relevant to record that from about the time that the Australian society was founded, Australian membership of the International Association of Agricultural Economists began to rise markedly. From the 1958 Madras conference on, Australians have attended the triennial conferences of the International Association in significant numbers and have been recognised in the programs thereof. Of more relevance is the fact that the Thirteenth Conference of the Association was held in Sydney in August 1967, only ten years after the national society was formed. This event was helpful to the Australian profession not only because it provided the opportunity for a much larger number of Australian agricultural economists to establish international contacts, but more importantly because it brought the existence of a professionally competent Australian group to the attention of the overseas practitioners.

Relationships of the New Profession with other Organisations

(a) Relations with agricultural scientists

It is easy after a quarter of a century to overlook or forget the difficulties and frustrations with which the early workers in the profession were beset. Not the least of these arose from the comparatively late start of the agricultural economics profession in Australia. The physical and biological strands of agricultural science were well entrenched by the time of the Second World War and workers in these fields generally were unreceptive and even suspicious of the possible contribution of agricultural economics.17 I have already referred to the reaction of the CSIR executive to various proposals regarding agricultural economics. Those who have laboured to build up staff and facilities for agricultural


economics in an agricultural faculty will also appreciate the difficulties of this nature. Generally speaking, the fight for resources is tougher in a large multi-faculty university (especially when there is a range of professional faculties) than it is in a less competitive atmosphere. As an external observer, it seems to me that this is one advantage the agricultural economists have enjoyed at the University of New England.\textsuperscript{18} It must have also helped to have the Faculty of Agricultural Economics specifically mentioned among the four faculties listed in the Act of incorporation of the University in 1953.\textsuperscript{19}

In retrospect, I believe that one of the most effective places for getting scientists to appreciate economic issues occurred at multidisciplinary gatherings called to consider such matters as land settlement, irrigation, the use of arid lands and the development of tropical Australia. Even so, in some cases, such as the Ord development, the admonitions were voiced in vain.

(b) \textit{Relations with economists}

Opposition in the early days came not only from scientists but also from economists themselves. By the mid-fifties agricultural economics had come to be accepted by the Australian economics profession as a legitimate applied field, judging by such objective measures as the programs of Section G of ANZAAS and the contents of the \textit{Economic Record}. However, there were some continuing problems. At a meeting of the Faculty of Economics at the University of Sydney on 8 April 1957, the Dean, S.J. Butlin, in a prepared statement attacked the Faculty of Agriculture for considering the establishment of a bachelor of agricultural economics degree

\textsuperscript{18} There are, of course, other views. For example, Deutsch and others after their multi-country study of advances in social science over 70 years concluded that "locating a highly specialized social science discipline in a small town or college 'far away from all distractions' seems...to be a very promising prescription for sterility". K.W. Deutsch, J. Platt and D. Senghaas, "Conditions Favoring Major Advances in Social Science", \textit{Science}, Vol. 71, No. 3970 (5 February 1971), p. 458.

\textsuperscript{19} University of New England Act, No. 34 of 1953.
and a diploma in agricultural economics without consultation with his Faculty. He spoke of what he claimed was "an apparent breach of trust" *vis-a-vis* the Commonwealth Bank and asserted, *inter alia*, that there should be no additional staff appointed in agricultural economics without consideration of his Faculty's needs. There were also difficulties in getting the Faculty of Economics at Sydney to award the master's degree in economics to people specialising in agricultural economics. By way of contrast, at the University of New England the economists and agricultural economists amalgamated to form a single faculty in 1971.

(c) **Internal disagreements**

There were also disagreements, or at least counter-productive activities, within the agricultural economics discipline itself. Following the successful inaugural meeting of the Society in Sydney in February 1957, the then Director of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, T.H. Strong, gave an address in Queensland extremely critical of the papers read at the Sydney meeting. His address was reported in considerable detail in *Queensland Country Life*. It is doubtful whether a joint reply by a group of university-based interstate economists in a subsequent issue did much to redress the damage. In the same year, an abortive attempt was also made to prevent the publication of the first issue of the Society's *Journal* through questionable use of federal-state agricultural relations. In the latter case it was a paper of mine which gave rise to the *cri de coeur* from Canberra.

(d) **Relations with farm organisations**

The history of relationships between the agricultural economics profession and farmers and farm organisations has also been chequered. In 1958 the Australian Dairy Farmers' Federation launched one of its periodic forays designed to maintain or increase the extent of the federal subsidy on dairy products. According to a reliable authority, the executive of the Federation believed that the Commonwealth Treasury suspected that the advice of agricultural economists, whether governmental or academic, was not unbiased. Accordingly, the Federation put a proposition to the Faculty of Economics at the University of Sydney that, for a fee, its members should embark on a wide-ranging survey of the dairy industry to help bolster the industry's case for protection. The final report appeared in May 1959 and two years later became the basis of
Drane and Edwards' book on the Australian dairy industry.20

Irrespective of the quality of this work, I have always regarded the incident as an unfortunate reflection on a young profession. The appeal to Karmel and Downing in 1959 by the McCarthy Committee of Inquiry into the Dairy Industry to prepare a report on the industry could well have been motivated by similar considerations. I do not believe that the then members of the faculties of economics had any monopoly on "independent and disinterested" research, as Drane and Edwards described their work. But times do change. In 1975 I was asked (but declined) to write the background paper for the IAC's first enquiry into the dairy industry.

Australian agricultural economists have had difficulties with organised agriculture primarily because their advocacy of reformist policies has run counter to the industries' norms and expectations. As might be expected the farmers' ire has been primarily directed against academics rather than bureaucrats. The refusal of dairyfarmers to have any truck with the collective submission by seven academic agricultural economists to the McCarthy enquiry in 1960 on the grounds that their analysis omitted "the social, political and cultural aspects of the dairy industry"21 would be one example. Alan Lloyd's fight against the farming of Victorian deserts would be another. Other agricultural economists have been denigrated by the irrigation lobby. In the case of New England, Jack Lewis was the bête noire of the dairy industry particularly following the anonymous publication of the *Current Affairs Bulletin* on "Milking the Australian Economy",22 which was subsequently published elsewhere under his own name.


Agricultural economists have received virtually nothing from the wheat industry research committees in the past three decades. In my own case, it was made abundantly clear to me quite early that I could not expect to receive research grants for my Department while I held the views I did on wheat price stabilisation. By way of contrast, I have always found the graziers' organisations prepared to listen to advice even when it could be considered counter to their interests as in the debate about the wool reserve-price scheme. I think it is to the profession's credit that major contributions were made on the dairy and wheat industries at Armidale and Sydney in spite of the lack of farmer support.

Overcoming the Tyranny of Old Paradigms

I have already referred to the fact that agricultural economics came relatively late onto the Australian farming scene. This meant that initially there were some constraints on what could be accomplished by the profession both as regards its research activities and on its effectiveness in the area of advice on public policy.

(a) Misplaced methodological expectations

In a day when farmer organisations have expert staff whose advice they listen to, when first-rate training facilities in agricultural economics are available and when the profession is quick to take on board new advances in methodology, it is perhaps difficult to appreciate the problems confronting early workers. For instance, many personnel were perforce recruited in the early days with a minimum of training in the social sciences (much less in economics) and consequently there were limitations on the work these people were capable of undertaking. In some instances, it was a case of the blind leading the blind. Field surveys with ill-defined, if any, economic objectives and general land utilisation and farm accounting studies with questionable benefits were widely advocated and, in a sense, expected by technocrats and farmer clientele. Farmers aside, Jack Lewis has recounted how "it took some effort to stamp out the concepts of the role of agricultural economics (and notions of what the subject should properly embrace) held by some university
administrators and by Rural Science colleagues."

(b) *Ill-advised policy demands*

To anyone interested in promoting more rational public policy in agriculture, it was the constraints of farmer folklore about the type of agricultural policy to which they were entitled which were a greater frustration than ill-trained staff. Most of the expectations of farmers in this area had developed in days before economic analyses were regarded as relevant in agricultural policy formation. To be concrete, I believe that the Royal Commission on the Wheat, Bread and Flour Industries in the middle thirties did a great deal of mischief in encouraging farmers to believe that costs of production were relevant in price determination. As a consequence thousands of man-hours of researchers' time have been wasted over the years in trying to satisfy this fetish of farmers in a number of industries.

In the same vein, it has taken decades to convince farmers and legislators of the shortcomings of home consumption price schemes and to disabuse them of the notion that buffer funds were capable of providing the answer to price and production instability in agriculture. Whether the industries concerned would have been better off if these schemes had not become institutionalised may perhaps be debatable, but there can be no doubt that much energy could have been saved and much abuse avoided if Australian agricultural economists had not had to contend with these ill-advised schemes over such a long period of time.

*The Future of the Profession*

In discussing the growth of an applied science related to a specific industry, one is led to ask how closely the growth of the discipline and also its future are tied up with the relative importance and economic fortunes of the industry it serves. There would seem little doubt that the rise of the Australian agricultural economics profession, though delayed by world-shattering events like the Great Depression and World War II, was helped at mid-century by the then political and

economic strength of the rural sector, the growth of government intervention in the agricultural industries in the aftermath of the Depression, the stress on agricultural expansion and the dominance of rural products in the country's exports.

In the years since then, the structure of the Australian economy has changed, the agricultural industries have undergone substantial adjustment and there have been significant changes in international trade and finance. Other sectors have called on the government to provide equivalent research inputs into their industries as have been received by the rural industries. The Industries Assistance Commission has become involved in a much wider range of enquiries than its predecessor. The skills in applied economics acquired by graduates from courses in agricultural economics are being increasingly recognised outside the agricultural industry and the external demand for them is rising.

I do not believe that Australian agricultural economics has as yet been seriously threatened by the latter-day relative decline in agriculture. Indeed the profession has helped to facilitate adjustment in the industry. Moreover in its research activities it has been fairly adept in responding to changes in the rural industry. Such behaviour, if continued, must enhance its life expectancy. There is therefore good reason to believe that the twenty-fifth anniversary of the establishment of agricultural economics at the University of New England will not come to be regarded in future years as a watershed in the profession but rather as an occasion when the profession rededicated itself to the pursuit of the dual objectives of relevance and excellence.
Agricultural Economics in the State Government Sector

Dr Colin C. Gellatly
Chief, Division of Marketing and Economic Services,
N.S.W. Department of Agriculture
1. Introduction

State governments have had a close association with the Department of Agricultural Economics and Business Management at UNE whose graduates have been and are a source of staff for most state departments of agriculture. It is worth noting too that a large number of Australia's leading agricultural economists spent time in state departments of agriculture early in their careers, e.g., Campbell, Lloyd, Gruen, Dillon, Parish, and Freebairn, to name only a few.

I intend first to review briefly the history of agricultural economics in the state government sector, then to spend some time discussing the role agricultural economists play in this sector. I will conclude by making some brief observations about the future. While I have obtained information from agricultural economists in other states, the views expressed are obviously biased towards the experiences of agricultural economists in the N.S.W. Government sector.

2. History

2.1 The Beginnings

A review of the development of agricultural economics in the state government sector throughout Australia reveals a similar pattern in most states. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s several states employed an individual economist although not as part of a formal section. In Queensland and
New South Wales the Departments of Agriculture had Marketing Branches headed by a Director of Marketing. These activities in both States followed the introduction of marketing legislation in the 1920s – the Marketing of Primary Products Act of 1927 in New South Wales and the Primary Producers Organisation and Marketing Act of 1926 (a consolidation of two earlier Acts) in Queensland. The main objective of this legislation was to allow the formation of marketing boards, although the N.S.W. Act specifically included provisions establishing a State Marketing Bureau to collect economic data such as prices, production statistics and costs of producing agricultural commodities.

New South Wales was the first State formally to create an agricultural economics section. The intention to establish an agricultural economics research bureau was announced by the N.S.W. Premier, William McKell, in an agricultural policy speech in April 1941. The Agricultural Economics Division had its origins with Sir John Crawford. In March 1941, Sir John, who was then an economist with the Rural Bank, was appointed as an economic adviser to the Department of Agriculture. Following submissions by Crawford, the Division of Agricultural Economics was established in October 1941 with a staff of four supervised by Crawford. The activities of the new Division included cost-of-production surveys, investigation of economic aspects of fodder conservation, land settlement problems, farmers' debts, marginal-area problems, land-use surveys, market outlets for agricultural commodities, and special studies of wartime problems, organisation of industries, price-fixing and disposal of surplus products.

It is interesting to note some comments on Departmental files relating to the setting up of the Division.

One senior Departmental officer commented:

I concur with the views of others that a strong agricultural background of experience is essential before an economist can be regarded as an agricultural economist.

And a principal of an agricultural college advising the then Department Head on the type of staff said:

The pure economist misses badly when it comes to rural economic problems. In the first place he
doesn't understand either the scope or the needs, and, in the second place, he is too ignorant of rural affairs to be acceptable among the people with whom he must work and for whom he serves.

The mid-1950s saw the expansion of the number of economists in the N.S.W. Department and creation of economics divisions in other states. Economists were first employed in the South Australian Department in 1955 and in the Victorian Department in 1953. In Queensland, the Marketing Division remained as a single unit until a reorganisation in 1958 resulted in the creation of a Marketing Services Branch and an Economic Research Branch. An important feature of the N.S.W. developments, followed by some of the other states, was the trainee system which, in part, was responsible for the high quality of staff found in the N.S.W. Division. (By then there had been an amalgamation of the Marketing Division and the Agricultural Economics Division.) These developments in the 1950s reflected a demand for more economic data for advice to farmers and a need for understanding of the economic aspects of the agricultural sector. Other factors which had an impact on the development of agricultural economics in the state government sector appear to have been in response to creation of the BAE and the perceived need by departments for economic advice when participating in the Australian Agricultural Council and the Standing Committee on Agriculture. It is interesting to note that these major developments occurred at around the same time as the Department of Agricultural Economics at UNE began.

As other speakers have noted, the mid-fifties was the take-off point for the agricultural economics profession in Australia, with the work of agricultural economists being concentrated on production economics and surveys.

2.2 The Expansion

The 1960s was a period of expansion in the agricultural economics sections of state departments. The impetus for this expansion was the interest in farm management. As P.C. Druce, then Chief of the N.S.W. Division of Marketing and Agricultural Economics, noted in his comments at the first Conference of Agricultural Economists in 1956:

In my opinion the most important function of the
States in the field of agricultural economics is in farm management – both research and extension.

There was a general interest in farm management as whole-farm management groups as well as several recording schemes – of varying success – were established. The rapid expansion of farm management groups in the 1960s was made possible by the utilisation of computer data processing which, although in its infancy, did make techniques such as LP more accessible.

The role of departmental economists was not in disseminating such farm management information directly, but in assisting technical advisers such as livestock officers and agronomists to take a broader approach to advisory work.

The expansion in economics staff together with the interest in farm management resulted in the establishment of regional economists' positions. In New South Wales the first such position was established in 1960, in Queensland in 1963, and in South Australia in 1967. This development was aided by the Commonwealth Extension Services Grant.

The emphasis on farm management moderated in the 1970s, but in the early '70s the number of economists continued to expand then, in the late '70s, as financial constraints started to have an impact on state public services, generally appeared to stabilise.

The 1970s also saw the focus of economists' work shift to policy analysis and advice. This, I believe, was because of the economic situation facing the agricultural industries, requests for assistance, and structural adjustment pressures. At the same time, the IAC began its activities and the Green Paper on rural policy was released.

This emphasis on policy analysis has continued in the 1980s with a recent emphasis on marketing.
2.3 **Current Numbers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Head Office</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>119</strong></td>
<td><strong>64</strong></td>
<td><strong>183</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. **Role of Agricultural Economics in the State Government Sector**

3.1 **General**

As outlined in the previous section, agricultural economists are now an accepted part of state departments of agriculture. It is possible to identify five main areas of work: policy advice, farm management, applied research, community information and outlook, and general economic services. All these areas can be considered as ultimately providing information to improve decision-making, whether it be at the policy level or farm level.

The real distinguishing feature of agricultural economists in the state departments is that they are part of a network of technical staff such as agronomists, livestock officers, veterinarians, inspectors and agricultural scientists. This has the advantage of enabling economists to work and interact with other disciplines - but does have its difficulties, particularly in policy.

The other general point which should be made is that the leaders of state departments of agriculture are usually from the ranks of technical professions. On the odd occasion (e.g., recently in South Australia) that a top departmental administrator has had an economic bent, there has been a subsequent upgrading of the role of economists in that
department.

Generally, I consider that economists have had a significant impact. In state government they have always been subject to a constant demand for general economic services and enquiries. In recent years, however, there has been an increase in their short-term ad hoc duties which, combined with an increased policy role, has made it more difficult for state government agricultural economists to undertake long-term research projects.

From accounts of early years in my Division and also from its Review of Marketing and Agricultural Economics at the time, it is clear that economists in Head Office had more time available for long-term research projects. Today, unless it is directly related to an existing or emerging policy issue, it is nearly impossible for such economists to justify a research project.

Locating agricultural economists on research stations has not been popular in state departments, although at present there are three such positions in New South Wales. I see this, however, as an area in which state-employed agricultural economists can have a significant impact and would hope to see it become an area of growth.

Recently, in South Australia, a systems research group has been established and is located in the economics division. While the systems approach has been around for a long time and has been operating successfully, e.g., in the international agricultural research centre network, it has not been well developed in state departments of agriculture in Australia. However, this is an area where the emphasis on empirics and quantitative methods in agricultural economists' training enhances the role of economists. This is particularly important now as many biotechnical experiments can be modelled on the computer, in some cases much more effectively than by traditional experimental methods.

Economists located on research stations are rarely as disadvantaged as regional economists. The number of enquiries faced by the latter, and the demand on them to undertake short-term research projects, often make it difficult for them to undertake longer term research projects and may even cause promotional problems.
In some states, regional economists have no research brief. Their role is regarded as advisory, they are solely responsible to regional administrators, and thus they have little professional contact with the economics division.

The concern I have about the current situation is that the time available for worthwhile research has diminished. The fact that so much of the economist's time is devoted to working parties, committees, task forces, etc., means a considerable amount of work is not published and, consequently, is not made available to the profession generally. If agricultural economists in state departments are to contribute to the profession as a whole and be subject to outside peer review, this balance must be redressed.

In recent years, changes to state public services generally have had a major impact on the role of state-employed agricultural economists. In New South Wales the Wilenski Report has altered the traditional idea of an independent public service, and departments are more responsive to ministerial and governmental objectives. There has also been a trend towards the use of generalists rather than specialists: policy advisers dealing with economic issues, for example, often have no training in economics.

The related general point is that the traditional concentration of economists in agricultural economics has been reflected in state public services. In New South Wales, there are forty in the Department of Agriculture and seven in Treasury. Recently, however, in New South Wales, Forestry, Water Resources, Mineral Resources, Environment and Planning, Pollution Control Commission, to name a few, have also employed economists, often agricultural economists. So too has the Electricity Commission - even if its advertisement included amongst the requirements an engineering degree.

3.2 Policy Advice

The role of agricultural economists here involves advising departmental executives and ministers as well as participating in Standing Committee/Australian Agricultural Council briefings, working parties, IAC and various ad hoc enquiries.

Because of the constitutional division of powers, agricultural economists in state government have not to a great extent been directly involved in trade issues or in
general macro policy issues such as exchange rates, inflation and interest rates. States are more concerned with pricing policies, marketing authorities, resource policy, e.g., water and land use, and such other matters under the direct control of state governments.

State economists have a strong role in advising for SCA/AAC which is the major policy forum on agricultural issues between the states and the Commonwealth. For a short time, there was an official Marketing and Economics Committee of Standing Committee but, since its demise in 1978, the involvement has been through advising Standing Committee representatives or participating in working parties.

The increasing policy role of agricultural economists in state government raises the question of how to provide the policy advice. Agricultural economists are well trained to advise on efficiency aspects of government intervention but, particularly in state governments, they are constantly faced with equity or distribution aspects of policy.

As Seiper has highlighted so well in relation to Australian agricultural policy, policy decision can be explained as well by distributive theory as by public interest theory. I believe it would be generally agreed that both these theories are needed to explain the way governments operate at different times on different issues.

A purist would say that economists should push the efficiency line and that direct measures should be used to correct the distributional effects. Even this implies that economists should be able at least to identify the distribution of gains or losses as well as the efficiency effects. However, in reality, if the economist in state government is to be used as a policy adviser, he/she has to be making firm recommendations. On these equity issues, the economist also has a role in pointing out where others (technical people) are making value judgements.

I would agree with Alan Lloyd that most senior public servants have a genuine concern for the pursuit of the public good. However, as he points out, there are other competing loyalties as well as the understandable concern for career advancement. He also notes that excessive personal loyalty to a minister is not unknown. Departmental loyalty often plays a major role in policy advice, particularly in rivalry with other
departments. By citing his experience in the N.S.W. Department of Agriculture in 1949, Lloyd illustrates how divisional loyalty can encroach on concern for the common good. At that time, he became embroiled in the "battle of the fats" in which the Dairying Division automatically supported margarine restrictions and the Division of Plant Industry supported vegetable oils. Given my own recent experiences with dairy policy, I can assure Alan that divisional loyalty is as strong as ever.

As a general rule, divisions are loyal to industry views because they identify with the industry and have close working relationships with producers in particular industries. On the other hand, when economists are requested to give neutral economic advice, they are generally regarded as "anti-industry" or "anti-agricultural". Indeed, in some quarters, particularly by those industries which are receiving relatively high rates of assistance, we are seen as a consumer's lobby group in disguise - or as mad free-marketeers.

Professional loyalty plays a vital role and can make politicians wary of the advice received, particularly from economists.

While recognising the broader implications of issues, economists are also faced with state loyalties. This is obvious from some state departments' IAC submissions.

All these conflicting loyalties are best summed up by an analogy I have adapted from Alan Lloyd on the role of an economist:

[It is the same as] playing a football match on the opponent's home ground, running against the wind and [having] the referee paid off by the opponent's supporters.

To sum up the present situation, I think that economists in state departments have increased their scoring rate, although maybe not their win/loss record.

There is one other concern I have about policy formulation in the state government sector and that is the lack of public debate: there is no equivalent forum to the IAC. I think this is because so much is carried out behind
closed doors and because independent agricultural economists have been inactive or have ignored current issues in their research.

3.3 Other Areas

(i) Farm Management

The role of economists in farm management is well accepted in state departments, but there is always a question of how much an economist should be involved in providing advisory information as opposed to acting as a resource person for other advisory staff. I support the resource person approach and believe this is generally accepted. Also accepted is the fact that departmental economists should stop short of individual farm management advice which is the domain of farm management consultants.

The recent computer developments have sparked a renewed interest by departmental economists in farm management. At the same time, these developments have highlighted the fact that economists in regions have a broader role than previously perceived and do undertake applied regional research. Consequently, in New South Wales, five new positions of farm management adviser have been created. These will supply resource people concentrating on farm management.

(ii) Research

As I have already said, increasing constraints and less freedom make it difficult for state department economists to undertake longer term research. However, research is still possible and must be supported if economics divisions are to preserve professional standards and maintain their stock of human capital. Important areas of economic research certainly exist, and two ways of exploiting them are to locate economists on research stations and to obtain industry research funds.

(iii) Commodity Information and Outlook

This is an important part of state department agricultural economic services. State economists have a complementary role to play in disseminating the national outlook information of the BAE and in providing a state perspective.
4. Conclusions

I have no doubt that agricultural economists will continue to have an important role in state government, particularly in departments of agriculture. The policy advisory role will continue to increase in importance but will expand beyond the traditional areas such as marketing.

There are several important areas where agricultural economists now have little impact but where they are likely to in the future. These include the field of land and water resources and the general field of regulation, both in the food marketing area and in production areas such as pesticides and animal health.

Another important field will be the study of regional impact of policy. IAC enquiries have shown up a deficiency in this area. State agricultural economists should be adapting for regional use the various econometric and input/output models available. The soon-to-be-developed input/output tables for New South Wales should facilitate such research in that State.

In the traditional area of marketing, agricultural economists face challenges in food marketing and need to come to grips with the "business marketing" approach.

As mentioned previously, my main area of concern is the need to ensure that, despite increasing pressures on them for short-term ad hoc analyses, agricultural economists in the state government sector are given the opportunity to undertake worthwhile research.
Agricultural Economics in Canberra

Geoff L. Miller
Deputy Secretary,
Department of Primary Industry
The Australian farmer's perception of the need for more economists in Canberra is little different from the American farmer's perception of the need for more economists in Washington. The latter was aptly summarised on a bumper sticker sighted during a farmers' protest rally. It read: "Save the Family Farm - Eat an Economist."

If the label of "economist" is a difficult one to wear, imagine the burden to be borne by those who also must identify themselves as working for "the Government". Everyone knows that the third greatest lie of the twentieth century is: "I'm from the Government and I'm here to help you." In Australia today the words "Canberra economist" conjure up visions of a fat, lazy, tax-eating bureaucrat to be found strutting the halls of power uttering unintelligible hyroglyphics with old testament religious fervour.

What has happened to our profession - a profession that bases its doctrine on the ethical premise of maximum human welfare? Where are the economists when the great social debates on employment, medical care, urban development, public transport or education are conducted? How many of our parliamentary representatives would identify themselves as economists? How many business leaders? Or even heads of state departments of agriculture?

It would be a mistake to infer that the influence of economists is on the wane. It most definitely is not. What is
happening, however, is that proportionately fewer and fewer applied economists are willing to identify themselves as economists. They masquerade under titles such as business manager, market analyst, administrator, treasurer and even bureaucrat! Let me illustrate the dichotomy that has developed by referring to a tactic employed by a very good applied economist who is a colleague of mine on a board of which I am a member. On the odd occasion on which we take opposite sides on an issue, he prefaxes his comments by saying: "I am not an economist, you'll have to look to Geoff for an economist's view..." There then follows a sound and logical economic argument supporting his case. He knows that, when I follow, the label he has placed on me will mean that half the board won't even hear what I have to say! And do you know, sometimes his tactic actually works!

This audience will be well aware that just as proportionately fewer applied economists identify themselves as economists, so too is proportionately less applied economics being taught in faculties that identify themselves as economic faculties. We are well into the era of the business school. When I was a graduate student at Stanford University, I found that my associates in the Business School were covering much the same ground as I was covering in the Economics Department. The difference was not in the principles being taught, but in the way they were taught.

I have found that the way people are taught economics has a large bearing on their value as applied economists. Those who are taught applications of the theory as rigorously as the theory itself are the most useful. There are few of them. Those who are taught to apply economics less rigorously, even if their theory suffers from the same disability, benefit nevertheless from having addressed empirical problems. Good theorists with little training in applications, usually burn up all their energy (and other people's patience) telling policy decision-makers why the data cannot be usefully employed, why no inference can be drawn from the results of the analysis, or (at the other extreme) advocating excessively simplistic solutions to complex practical problems.

Of course, people graduating in agricultural economics suffer the disabilities of the pure economist to a far lesser degree. They are far less bound by the confines of the purist Walrus/Pareto paradigm, while for the most part they are also
at least as well versed in the theory. They are inclined to look to the practical world for inputs into their analysis, as well as to textbooks of economic theory. They have learned the application of economics to something, rather than having learned the principles for their own sake.

So agricultural economists in Canberra begin with a head start. However, that does not necessarily ensure that their endeavours will be productive. With many years of accumulated prejudice, I think I can objectively assert that those who joined the BAE have probably been more empirically productive, on average, than most, notwithstanding Keith Campbell’s comments on earlier cost-of-production studies. Yet in the BAE, in recent years, a great deal has been learned, with substantial contributions by Jock Anderson and Jack Lewis, about improving the productivity of professional resources.

I am going to divert a long way from my principal theme, namely, the effectiveness of economists in the policy advisory process, to record the enormous changes that have been undertaken in the organisation and management of the BAE in recent years. Of course, reorganisation of government agencies is, and should be, a frequent occurrence. Changes undertaken in the BAE, beginning in 1979-80, however, had some unique features.

Thirteen years working within the Bureau had led the then Director to some firm views about the organisation. As a research institution, its productivity was low. As a policy agency, its influence was much less than it should have been. There were no built-in arrangements for planning its research program, nor for assessing its performance. A high proportion of work commenced was never completed. The supervisory burden on senior staff was so great as to cripple their efforts to direct and undertake continuing work. Yet the level and quality of supervision was poor. There were simply too many middle and lower level staff relative to more senior people. Draft papers circulated and recirculated, but seemed to go nowhere. Data from the Bureau’s survey program were published far too late usefully to inform policy-makers and rural people. There was little coordination between the Bureau’s work program and the policy agenda.

Of course, all such judgements are relative to what is evidently attainable. Despite the strength of these criticisms,
the Bureau, compared with many comparable agencies, was even then an effective organisation.

The major single challenge in running an agency such as the BAE is to develop a coincidence between corporate objectives and those of its individual talented and creative researchers and analysts. Furthermore, this coincidence has to be developed at a high level of individual motivation. Effective assessment and promotion systems must be coupled with opportunities for peer-group recognition through professional publication. It is necessary to have sufficient freedom and participation in decision-making to allow creativity to flourish. Yet there must be sufficient firmness in decision-making to have the organisation get on with its work in a decisive and determined manner.

The changes actually made in the BAE were briefly summarised in its (one and only) 1979–80 Annual Report (BAE 1980). (Subsequent Reports were incorporated into that of the Department of Primary Industry.) The full diagnosis and development of some of these prescriptions was set out in a report prepared for the Public Service Board (BAE, 1979). Key elements included:

A comprehensive system of corporate planning, redefining the objectives of the Bureau, and matching its resources each year to a corporate research program;

Complete restructuring of the organisation towards a less hierarchical structure more suited to a research agency, with emphasis on maximising individual and group achievement;

Reduction in staff numbers by about 15 per cent, to encourage more personal supervision and to increase the capital intensity of research, particularly in relation to electronic technology;

Replacement of the (ambiguous) Quarterly Review of Agricultural Economics with a dual journal output policy, encouraging professional papers to be submitted to outside journals and creating a new quarterly review of the rural economy as a more efficient instrument for communicating the Bureau's output to less
specialised readers;

Disbandment of the hierarchical "Editorial Committee" and its replacement with a more democratic editorial system under the direction of a full-time editor (the new Bureau Chief Economist) utilising an internal and external refereeing system;

The implementation of an annual program review conference to allow open debate and discussion of the Bureau's work program, its administration system and its management practices.

The annual review of the BAB's research performance, presented by the Chief Economist to each year's Program Review Conference, provides a record by which the Bureau's productivity can be assessed. In 1980-81, in the year following the reorganisation, Jack Lewis reported an 80 per cent increase in the volume of output and "a noticeable upgrading in the professionalism and analytic competence of the Bureau's work" (Lewis 1981, p.6) while at the same time documenting its shortcomings in no uncertain terms! In 1981-82, Jack reported a further 32 per cent increase in output (Lewis 1982, p.4) but seemed to be running into increasing difficulties in keeping count!

The improvements in the performance of the BAB in the post-1979-80 era will be judged more objectively by the profession in due course. However, at this conference celebrating the University of New England's Silver Jubilee, it is worth recording the New England connection. The then Director of the Bureau was a New England graduate, though his role was only to fantasise an alternative BAB in his mind's eye and to (mindlessly) insist that his fantasy be acted out! Those principally responsible for turning the dream into a practical reality were Denis Hussey (not a New England graduate, but a Kiwi whom most of us would gladly embrace as our own), Jock Anderson (from New England, who spent two years as the Bureau's Foundation Chief Economist, in a temporary diversion from his ascent of the academic ladder!), and Jack Lewis (Foundation Professor of Agricultural Economics at New England, who spent two productive pre-twilight years as the Bureau's second Chief Economist). Of course, the reconstruction of the BAB was really a team effort, with many of the key participants not having been
touched by the New England wand!

As instructive as it may be to divert into a longer dissertation about improving the professional performance of economists within institutions, the effectiveness of our profession in the policy advisory process has much more to do with between-institution performance.

In the past couple of years, in my capacity as Deputy Secretary of the Department of Primary Industry, I have become painfully aware of our deficiencies in this regard. There exists a great communication gulf between the policy-makers and the economists. Whether you look at the IAC and its relationship with the Department of Industry and Commerce, the Treasury with the Cabinet Economic Committee, or the BAE with the Department of Primary Industry, the gulf exists, to varying degrees. I am firmly of the view that the marginal-value product of efforts to close this gulf far exceeds the marginal cost.

This is not, however, a problem that will easily be resolved. The skills required for policy extension are, by and large, not being taught. And people who do embody the seeds that might grow into such skills - they must be well-trained economists - are discouraged from entering the field. Of fifteen or so new graduate appointments to the Department of Primary Industry each year, very few are good economists. This is not because the Department doesn't want them: it desperately needs them. It is because there are no applications. There are no applications because good students are told that, if they wish to go to Canberra, they should go to the BAE, or Treasury or the IAC, or maybe the Bureau of Statistics. Administrative policy departments are said to offer unfulfilling professional prospects. This is, to some extent, a self-fulfilling prophesy.

In science, there is a continuum of people filling the space between the most brilliant theoretical physicist and the most outstanding corporate business engineer. There is excellence to be found randomly distributed across this continuum. Not so in economics, at least in the policy areas. Excellence has been concentrated in institutions such as Treasury, IAC and the BAE.

The result is that in the policy domain the operative constraint is not the availability at the conceptual level of
appropriate policy responses, but the capacity to develop them into detailed empirical specifications and the ability to market them. These constraints include the availability of people capable of comprehending the difference between the conceptual and the practical, of translating complex proposals into understandable language, with the capacity to modify first-best plans efficiently to overcome political constraints, and the capacity to build new policy proposals that still retain the key economic elements of rejected proposals.

These skills and abilities are most important to our ultimate professional success. In their absence, policy debates are polarised. Research economists appear to be insensitively doctrinaire. Indeed, in the political domain we often lose credibility as a profession by advocating changes that are so extreme as to lie beyond the imagination of those we are attempting to convince. Then, when our advice is rejected, we are not held in sufficiently high esteem to be called upon to develop and present next-best options. The result is that the ordinary men and women who make policy decisions take refuge in the status quo.

In the economic policy advisory process, patience is a pre-requisite. Policy changes that move the policy process in the right direction, even though not going all the way, are better than no changes at all! If we are sufficiently adept at the process, it is often possible to implement small changes which can be reliably predicted to snowball so as inevitably to make further and more substantial change in the right direction.

There are enormous opportunities for improvements in economic policy by keen observation and the application of the most simple economic principles. When there is greater willingness to acknowledge the value of people undertaking practical work of this kind, and to train and motivate students to embark upon it, the respect with which economists are held within the community will be greatly enhanced. More economists will come out of the woodwork, hold their heads high, and proclaim their true professional allegiance. And fewer of their more outstanding policy masterpieces will fill pigeon holes!
References


Professional Interfaces and Impact of the Profession

Professor John W. Freebairn
Head, School of Agriculture,
La Trobe University
The questions I have sought to answer are: how does agricultural economics fit into the larger picture of scientific teaching, research and management; and, what are some of the influences that have flowed between agricultural economics and other disciplines? While my address will focus on the source professions, agricultural science and economics, there have been and will continue to be important links with other social sciences, e.g. political science, psychology, sociology and law; physical sciences, e.g. mathematics and engineering; and the biological sciences. No short or generally acceptable answer is likely to be found to my questions. This is because of the great diversity of skills and jobs undertaken by agricultural economists, and because it is an active and evolving discipline and profession.

There can be little doubt that agricultural economics is a well established discipline, although most of us, including myself, have difficulties in specifying what actually is or is not an agricultural economist. The discipline is represented by agencies and divisions in federal and state public services, by departments or other identifiable groups in almost all Australian universities, it has its own society with state branches, there are four professional journals and a considerable volume of other publications, and the title agricultural economist/farm consultant/farm adviser can be found on many doors in private industry. Professional activities extend beyond the more traditional areas of farm management, marketing and policy to include natural
resources, food and nutrition, rural communities, international trade, intersectoral linkages and their effects.

An interesting example of the diversity of agricultural economics is provided by the different ways in which a tertiary student can obtain a bachelor's degree with a substantial training in agricultural economics. In universities students enrol for a bachelor of economics degree and take agricultural economics subjects as optional third- and second-year subjects. The lecturer may be a member of the economics department, of an agricultural economics department, or of a school of agriculture. Alternatively, the student may be enrolled for a bachelor of agricultural science degree and take economics and agricultural economics subjects as part of the degree. Again, some of the lecturers will come from economics, agricultural economics and agricultural science departments. Another option is to enrol for a bachelor of agricultural economics degree. The different degrees have a common core of general economic theory, both microeconomic and macroeconomic, and usually a quantitative component based on statistics, regression analysis and programming. A variety of subjects varying from institution to institution and within institutions gives students a feeling for the physical, biological and institutional constraints and structure of agriculture, and they provide illustrations of the applicability of parts of the core economic theory in problem solving.

Taking a narrow intellectual point of view, agricultural economics can be viewed as a subdiscipline of economics in the same way as, say, international trade and labour economics. Particularly in Australia, agricultural economics has relied extensively on neoclassical theory. The picture of a profit-maximising producer, one among many thousands producing a homogeneous product, forms the backdrop for much of the farm management area. Much of the marketing and policy work relies on competitive partial-equilibrium models of supply and demand. Underlying most benefit-cost studies and the analyses of government intervention is the neoclassical paradigm. More recent work on intersectoral analyses and natural resources has also built on these foundations. While there have been a few critics of the paradigm, e.g. Healy (1966) and Stent (1976), in general I agree with Musgraves (1976) that there has been and still is "...a low level of controversy within the profession itself." To a large degree the assumptions of the neoclassical model provide a
reasonable approximation and simplification for many of the problems we study. As a twist we have developed special expertise to handle the uncertainties associated with agriculture’s dependence on nature and fickle world markets. Also, the pervasiveness of government controls provides a fertile field of study. The techniques can provide information on distributional and equity effects as well as efficiency effects in both positive and normative settings.

A second characteristic of Australian agricultural economics has been its quantitative content and attention to the solution of actual problems. This stems in part from our historical links with agricultural science and the agricultural establishment (more on this later) and in part from a deliberate choice by our founding educators. This particular attribute has well served the employment of agricultural economists as applied economists in the past, but by now general economics programs have caught up and in some cases have exceeded this feature of contemporary agricultural economics programs.

In short, agricultural economics is heavily reliant upon general economic theory for its intellectual framework and for many of its analytical tools. Being primarily applied economists, agricultural economists make few explicit contributions to economic theory although there is nothing like a real problem to isolate deficiencies in theory and sometimes solutions to puzzles. Even so, it is clear that there is more reading of general economics texts and journals by agricultural economists than the reverse. In a similar vein, agricultural economics will draw on other disciplines, including mathematics, statistics, political science, engineering and sociology, for ideas and theory.

Agricultural economists have made important contributions to the discipline of economics. Since this symposium has a celebratory atmosphere it seems appropriate to quote a few selected glowing commentaries. In his survey of Australian economic policy of 1968 Corden noted (p. 7):

The literature of agricultural economics is, along with that of wages policy, the most impressive branch of Australian economics, though more for its usefulness and its technical competence than its originality. Most of it is positive economics, so that more is known about the rural sector of the
Australian economy than any other. The considerable group of agricultural economists also writes widely in the field of production economics, some of them applying linear programming and other mathematical techniques to Australian problems, and they keep current trends and policy issues in the agricultural sector under continuous observation.

Leontief in his presidential address to the American Economic Association in 1970 observed (p. 5):

An exceptional example of a healthy balance between theoretical and empirical analysis and of the readiness of professional economists to cooperate with experts in the neighboring disciplines is offered by Agricultural Economics as it developed in this country over the last fifty years. A unique combination of social and political forces has secured for this area unusually strong organizational and generous financial support. Official agricultural statistics are more complete, reliable, and systematic than those pertaining to any other major sector of our economy. Close collaboration with agronomists provides agricultural economists with direct access to information of a technological kind. When they speak of crop rotation, fertilizers, or alternative harvesting techniques, they usually know, sometimes from personal experience, what they are talking about. Preoccupation with the standard of living of the rural population has led agricultural economists into collaboration with home economists and sociologists, that is, with social scientists of the "softer" kind. While centering their interest on only one part of the economic system, agricultural economists demonstrated the effectiveness of a systematic combination of theoretical approach with detailed factual analysis. They also were the first among economists to make use of the advanced methods of mathematical statistics. However, in their hands, statistical inference became a complement to, not a substitute for, empirical research.

Closer to home Ross Parish in his 1969 Presidential address to the Thirteenth Annual Conference of the Australian
Agricultural Economics Society (p. 1) began with:

Members of this Society should contemplate the present state of the agricultural economics discipline and profession in Australia with pride and gratification, ... the growth of agricultural economics has helped to correct certain weaknesses – particularly in microeconomics and econometrics – in the Australian economics profession as a whole.

These are fine sentiments that give one's heart a glow. But they were made some twelve or more years ago. For several reasons I think they are less true today than then. Our growing emphasis on economic theory and techniques has come at the expense of attention to institutional and technical details. To some extent agricultural economists have lost touch with farm management. The hiving off of farm management to farm management associations and the paucity of farm management type papers in the journals and annual conferences has left a gap in our skills for which we once were renowned. John Dillon in his Presidential address to the Australian Agricultural Economics Association in 1972 observed (p. 78):

I do not see such developments as constituting any disadvantage to agricultural economics in its farm management interests so long as sufficient economists keep a foot in both camps.

I fear that insufficient economists have kept an interest in farm management and that we risk a take-over by the various business schools.

Second, our microeconomic paradigm has been largely restricted to either of the extreme positions of perfect competition for the analysis of farmers and consumers and monopoly for the analysis of marketing boards. Between farmers and consumers we have left an enormous gap of business involved in processing, storing, transporting and distributing food and fibre. Nowadays some two-thirds of the consumer's food dollar goes to the off-farm sector and only one-third to the farm sector. In turn, the farmer spends over a half of his gross receipts on off-farm products and services. Many of our jobs are in the off-farm sector. Changes in the organisation and operation of the farm sector have efficiency,
distributional and equity effects on farmers. Yet, as a profession, our knowledge of this important off-farm sector is limited.

Because firm concentration is relatively high and because of the importance of product heterogeneity, it seems to me that we will have to dig long and hard into noncompetitive theory if we are effectively to analyse the off-farm sector. I see little future in pursuing the Bainian structure, conduct, performance model. General economic theory is developing interesting possibilities in the areas of conjectural variations – if you like, a model of rational expectations of oligopolistic behaviour – and contestable markets. Applied general economic analyses of deregulation may give guides and there are other groups of applied economists in manufacturing industry, transport, etc., with relevant expertise.

Corporations with large staffs raise different problems of coordination, labour management, and financial opportunities and management than does the family farm. It seems likely that if we want to contribute analytical techniques for analysing businesses in the off-farm sector and to provide graduates for these organisations, some major changes in our curriculum and methods of analysis will be necessary.

Finally, in terms of our previous role as leaders in quantitative techniques it seems that the econometricians and operations researchers have left us floundering in the dust. Fortunately, there are several of our profession who are well versed in recent developments in new techniques and in evaluating rapid developments in the computer age.

All is not gloom. In recent times members of the agricultural economics profession have made substantial contributions in other aspects of the economics profession. The Bureau of Agricultural Economics has served as a successful prototype for the Bureaux of Transport Economics, Industry Economics and Labour Market Research in the federal sphere. Many agricultural economists can be found throughout these and other parts of the public service. The growing consulting industry has found agricultural economists good staff for its expansion into developing country agriculture and other projects as well as the traditional Australian farm scene. Perhaps one of the most impressive achievements of the profession has been its penetration of the farmer lobby groups. This has resulted in a significant improvement in
agricultural policy debates in conjunction with the Green Paper, Farm Focus and Baiderstone reports. Agricultural economists have found ready markets for their skills and are having increased impacts on general economic as well as agricultural policy.

Agricultural economists in academia, government and industry have made important contributions to newer fields of study. Nowadays agriculture must include in its concern nutrition and food prices as well as farm prices and incomes. Commodity price changes in the 1970s revitalised the supply side of macroeconomic policy analysis and debate, and in turn macroeconomic policy and exchange rate policy are seen to have important effects on agriculture. Both general economists and agricultural economists have found this area stimulating. Provided agricultural economists keep pace with theoretical developments, their peculiar institutional knowledge can be of great assistance in analysing these general economy issues. A related issue is that of intersectoral interdependencies where general and agricultural economists have explored the effects of resources booms and manufacturing industry protection on the traditional agricultural sector.

Some other areas of major initial and continuing contributions by agricultural economists include: benefit-cost analyses of major public investments; the causes, distribution and possible policies for mitigating poverty; adjustment assistance problems and policies; assessment of the implicit value placed on environmental and other non-marketable goods and bads. A number of agricultural economists have played leading roles in the development of new areas such as urban economics, resource and recreation economics, marine economics and transport economics. Finally, we should not forget those who have made direct contributions to the traditional fields of both agricultural economics and general economics.

Let me turn briefly to consider some aspects of our relationship with the agricultural sciences. To an important extent the development of, structure of, and funding of agricultural economics can be linked with the special regard and unique position in which society held agriculture. For a variety of reasons, including the fundamental importance of agriculture whether as a provider of food, export income or great people and its atomistic structure, society has been
willing to devote large resources to agricultural sciences and special policy deals to assist farmers and their families. Partly because of these reasons there developed chemistry and agricultural chemistry, engineering and agricultural engineering, statistics and agricultural statistics, and economics and agricultural economics. While the perceived validity of these arguments may have waned, their momentum continues.

As the earlier quotations from Cordon and Leontief illustrate, we have had a special relationship with the agricultural sciences and many of us count agricultural scientists among our colleagues. In the areas of applied agricultural research and extension the reasons for having agricultural economists as part of the team are as strong as previously. The agricultural economist can provide an overall perspective not only at the farm level, which has reached its pinnacle in the farm consultant, but also further on in terms of commodity market effects, resource usage effects and effects on income distribution. Many natural scientists miss some of the subtleties of technical versus economic optima, and ultimately new technology needs to be cast in a profit-enhancing package. Perhaps a little presumptuously, some of us live in hope of a greater role for economic analysis in the selection, planning and analysis of biological research experiments. For our part, agricultural economists will need to be vigilant in choosing frameworks which are appropriate to specific problems and to avoid rushing into ones with the latest in economic jargon and wizardry.

Where research is more towards the basic and specialised end of the spectrum, whether by plant, animal, soil or agricultural economist scientist, the fruitful interaction of one discipline on the other seems likely to diminish. There certainly is a trend towards greater specialisation and narrowness of perspective in the "publish or perish" race. While some agricultural economists have taken a role of generalist I am not convinced that we either have or should have a monopoly on such positions.

An important segment of the activities of agricultural economists depends on knowledge of the underlying physical and biological features of the system under study. For example, it is difficult to imagine preparing an actual policy strategy for soil degradation without knowledge of the technical effects of alternative management strategies. That
is, I see continuation of a fruitful symbiotic relationship between a sector of the agricultural economics profession and the allied biological, agricultural and natural sciences.

I conclude with some observations about the challenges facing universities in their training of agricultural economists. First, the range of problems and issues for investigation is certain to continue expanding. Second, the range of skills used by different members of the profession is far too diverse to allow a comprehensive coverage in a course of three or four years. Third, the above two points indicate a need for a generalist education whose emphasis is on principles and modes of operation rather than on techniques. Similarly, if you like "different horses for different courses", there is a strong case for a number of alternative program structures. Some students will want and should be given the opportunity to include in their studies subjects from such disciplines as sociology, political science, labour relations, engineering, and business administration as well as the core disciplines of agriculture and economics. Fourth, in almost all cases raw graduates will require job-specific training to become fully conversant with the key physical, biological and institutional constraints of their problem context and to develop ease and competence with appropriate techniques. Finally, I am confident that the agricultural economics profession can continue to build upon its solid and enterprising achievements.

References


Agricultural Economics in Australia: Perspectives from Academe

Associate Professor Jock R. Anderson
Department of Agricultural Economics and Business Management, University of New England
Most agricultural economists spend much of their time speculating about the future. Some of this work is branded "forecasting" (e.g. Freebairn 1976, 1978; Jones (or was it Standen?) 1983), although not always to universal acclaim (Stent 1976, Anon. 1983). Such work is usually best rooted in the reality of recent observation, and the present speculations will follow this tradition.

To the extent that concrete data are referred to, this essay is unapologetically UNE-centric, as I hope befits the occasion. My rationale is that whatever is valid for UNE will probably apply fairly well to others. At UNE I am close to our "data" and I feel that, even if it may seem parochial, we should avail ourselves of this Silver Opportunity to consider where, to what, and how we are headed. Accordingly, my first digression is to explore the representativeness of UNE experiences so that I can unashamedly pursue my "local" case-study material.

UNE and the Australian Profession

Reliable data on the "profession" of agricultural economics in Australia are not readily to hand. The most natural starting point is the Directory of members of the Australian Agricultural Economics Society, painstakingly (albeit incompletely) assembled by Quilkey (1980). Data are more or less available for 706 members. Of these, 33 were foreign residents (I count New Zealanders as foreign for the
present purpose) and 21 were foreigners temporarily resident in Australia. Another 17 (including 7 UNE postgraduates) were Australians working "permanently" overseas. The Society also then included 54 non-graduate members who are also excluded from the core "professional" domestic members on whom attention is presently concentrated.

This group consists of 581 members, of whom 173 (30 per cent) have some qualifications from the UNE Department. Of these, 82 (47 per cent) have some postgraduate qualification (i.e., a diploma, or master's or Ph.D. degree). Unsurprisingly, if professional commitment is judged by financial membership of the Society, the retention rate has been much higher for our graduate students (82 of 225 or 36 per cent to 1980) compared with Bachelors of Agricultural Economics (91 of 429 or 21 per cent to 1980). Many of the latter 91 "goodies" have undertaken graduate work at other institutions, so there is a very heavy loss to the "profession" of "ordinary" graduates in the field, an observation that may not surprise some of my colleagues who occasionally get upset about the "ordinariness" of a few of our students.

Such quibbles aside, UNE clearly has had a role in educating a significant, hopefully representative, part of the profession, and my first speculation is that it will continue to do so, probably at something like the recent modest rate. The history of graduate production in several categories is summarised in Figure 1.

Recent Trends

Several trends are evident from the UNE experience, and these are probably reflected in most Australian universities. After the nursery phase at the University of Sydney in the fifties (which Keith Campbell has reflected on today) and the "glasshouse phase" nurtured by the N.S.W. Department of Agriculture Division of Marketing and Agricultural Economics (see, e.g., Dillon 1965), the other universities got into serious production in the early sixties (as Jack Lewis has described today). By the late sixties, throughput of undergraduates had virtually stabilised (with the exception of the early seventies blip) at contemporary levels.

Graduate studies took rather longer to gain momentum - too long, as I recall some of us seeming to take forever to finish! The production of postgraduate qualifications reached
significant levels in the early seventies and, since the mid-seventies, they have generally exceeded the numbers of bachelor degrees granted.

As is shown by the dark shaded areas in Figure 1, overseas candidates represent a very significant portion of the recent growth in graduate students, a point to which I will return later. In contrast, there have been relatively few foreign students in the bachelors' classes.

From human capital theory, one would expect the flux in numbers of students to reflect changing expectations of earnings in the profession. Unfortunately, I could not locate data on the expected earnings differentials for agricultural economists vis-à-vis say, other economists, other agricultural scientists or the professions in general. The U.S. experience is that there has been a premium earned by members of our profession (Hathaway 1969) and my intuition is that we too have enjoyed such benefit, although probably to a lesser extent. In some limited data dredging, I found that our enrolment and graduation patterns were remarkably unresponsive to economic conditions, so I presume that any such economic effects have been swamped by demographic characteristics that I've been unable to identify.

I did, however, identify some associations between membership of the Society (M) and features of the agricultural macro-economy, namely the BAE's real-farm income index (Y 1970/1 to 1972/3 = 100) and the share (S) of agriculture in GDP (mean 8.7 per cent) over the twenty-three years to the present. This association is most easily glimpsed as a constant elasticity equation:

\[ M = 815 Y^{0.18(0.08)} S^{-0.57(0.07)} \]

where the bracketed numbers after the elasticities are standard errors and the \( R^2 \) (log) = 0.73. Agricultural economists may have been "riding on the coat tails" of rural earnings (the positive Y effect) but they have been seemingly "hanging on by their teeth" as the relative importance of agriculture has declined. That is, for a further one per cent decline in the percentage of S from six per cent, there would on average be nearly an additional (-0.57) x (-1%/6%) 100 = 9.5 per cent increase in the membership of the Society, presumably to grapple with the problems of structural adjustment, farmer welfare and policy challenges that might
be associated with such inevitable change! All this, of course, leads one to share the same concerns that Bispot (1967) and Hathaway (1969) expressed for our U.S. colleagues in their adjustment or otherwise to analogous changes in urbanisation and industrialisation of society and economy.

The U.S. Experience as a Guide to the Future

In looking to the future, whether it is in technological, "cultural" or educational matters, it usually is instructive to reflect on contemporary U.S. experience. There are, however, some considerable structural differences. Strauss and Tarr (1982) note that U.S. agricultural economists are predominantly Ph.D.s, and continue to be employed mainly at predominantly educational institutions. Their Australian counterparts are mostly holders of bachelor degrees and are employed mainly by government departments. Their extension functions, however, would be attached to educational institutions in the U.S., so the major difference relates to emphasis on graduate qualifications.

The numbers of people involved in such international comparisons are, of course, very different. It is natural to search for denominators that ease comparison. An obvious one is the ratio of "professionally active" agricultural economists (domestic members of the Association/Society) to farmers (i.e., rural establishments). At 0.33 per cent, Australia has about twice the "density" of the U.S. at 0.14 per cent. Using the alternative denominator of gross value of rural production, we are also seen to be relatively well supplied at 50 vs. 30, respectively, agricultural economists per billion (1980) Australian dollars of output. The picture emerging is thus one of quantity and quality (at least as measured by educational attainment) differentials across the Pacific. There are doubtless other differences, such as aspects of gender. Lee (1982) reports that 24 per cent of present U.S. Ph.D. students are female which, although low, is surely higher than the corresponding Australian proportion. The proportion of females among UNE Ph.D. students (and also graduate students generally) in 1983 is about 10 per cent.

In the light of such data, where are the Australian universities such as UNE going? Certainly there is growing emphasis on graduate studies, but there are several differences from the U.S. model. First, there are still relatively few Ph.D. students, 10 of 103 current UNE
postgraduate candidates. Second, we have a much greater representation of foreign students, 53 per cent, with 50 per cent of our graduate students coming from LDCs, compared with 30 per cent of U.S. graduate enrolments in agricultural economics from LDCs (Pienup and Riley 1981).

**A Personal Thought on Australian Ph.D. Training**

I cannot resist the temptation to intrude my feelings about what I would like to happen in this regard. I think it is unfortunate that the majority of Australian Ph.D.-seeking agricultural economists continue to choose to study for this qualification overseas, especially in the U.S.A. I regret especially that, while I was seconded to the BAE, I was obliged to be a party to assisting such aspirants to overseas study at public expense, to make a "case" that Ph.D. training in Australia was inadequate and that overseas study was essential.

One would have to agree that the Australian option is surely "different" and rather deficient perhaps in terms of structured coursework. One could also admit that there may be non-educational advantages in a period overseas. However, if Australia continues to subsidise U.S. and U.K. graduate schools at the expense of her own, our tertiary institutions will not make the progress that they could, not fulfil the roles intended for them, and definitely not undertake the Australian-oriented in-depth research which is presently so scarce in our universities.

**Agricultural and other Economists in Australia**

On both absolute and relative scales then, the market for agricultural economists in Australia seems fairly well supplied (c.f. Schotzko 1980) – perhaps rather too well. Several factors complicate assessment of the supply position. Agricultural economists are now being trained at several institutions, from the named degrees at UNE and the University of Sydney, through various degrees of specialisation within degrees in agricultural or rural science at the University of Queensland, UNE, the University of Melbourne, La Trobe University, the University of Adelaide and the University of Western Australia, or within economics degrees at the University of Sydney, Monash University and the University of Adelaide, to the diversity of degree and other training in farm management and agribusiness at the colleges of advanced education and
agricultural colleges. Added to these definitional problems on
the supply side is the enthusiasm of some major employees,
notably the BAE, for hiring general economics graduates to
work on research and other problems in agriculture. This
apparent high degree of substitutability mirrors the ease with
which many agricultural economists have migrated to other
segments of the economics profession, including industrial,
labour, development, transport and urban economics, as well
as econometrics and operations research, to name but a few.

These mobilities within the wider profession and the loss
to the Australian profession by migration, retirement and
general decrepitude suggest to me that the present rate of
graduation is of about the right order of magnitude, even
though the domestic throughput alone is too small to sustain
the present ranks of teachers of agricultural economics.

*Overseas Students and Academic Survival*

The continued gainful employment of these teachers
depends, at the margin and well within, on maintenance of the
reasonably high (relatively speaking) throughput of foreign
students.

Is the continued flow of foreign (especially LDC) graduate
students (as illustrated in Figure 1) a pious hope for
contemporary academe? At the most fundamental level, the
LDCs are, in many instances, making substantial progress in
building up their educational institutions generally and for
graduate work in agricultural economics in particular.
However, there is demonstrably a long way to go, so that at
least a *potential* demand exists for several decades to come,
although competition to service it will be strong throughout
the First and Second Worlds.

For Australian institutions, translation of the potential
into actual demand depends crucially on Commonwealth
Government policies, executed in this regard primarily by the
Australian Development Assistance Bureau (ADAB) and, not
insignificantly if somewhat less directly, by the Agricultural
Development Council of New York (ADC) and AUIDP. The
signs are that Commonwealth sponsorship of graduate students
will continue for as long as the needs are perceived as
continuing. With the mentioned progress on national training
(at least to master's level) capacity in LDCs in "our" region, it
seems likely that the emphasis will gradually shift from
diploma and master's to doctoral training. Another related change that could be made at an early stage (see, e.g., MacAulay 1983) is to concentrate our foreign training on the "trainers" (i.e., present and future faculty members of the colleges and universities) rather than on public servants as is presently the case.

Conclusion

I would have liked to conclude by citing some notable contributions from the person that Russel Ward has identified as Australia's most successful agricultural economist, one Edward Kelly, but it seems that Ned did not leave many such gems. This 20th anniversary of Dr Martin Luther King's memorable march is, however, an appropriate year to quote from him, namely, his impassioned "I have a dream!!".

My dreams concerning the profession have many dimensions:-- healthy, thick timely issues of our Journal and the Review of Marketing and Agricultural Economics; continued active publication by Australians in the leading overseas journals; a steady stream of bright and dedicated undergraduate and postgraduate (especially Ph.D.) students into our universities and the profession; improved quality in our curricula and teaching -- see Anderson (1982) wherein I have identified a few pet areas of need; continued strong attention to agricultural development economics, but backed up by better support for teachers to undertake research in the Third World (perhaps ACIAR may help here); continued broadening of our perspectives towards rural economic and social problems in their widest context (see, e.g., Buchanan 1969); a strong and active Society; and, more parochially, a viable Department at UNE supported by an active Alumni Association with a network around the world that would make Henry Kissinger jealous: "I have a dream!!".

References


Freebairn, J.W. (1978), *Economic Forecasting: What Type of Crystal Ball?*, Inaugural Lecture, La Trobe University, Bundoora.


Figure 1 UNE agricultural economics bachelor and postgraduate qualifications awarded, Australia and overseas, by year 1960-83.
A Future View from Professional Practice

Dr Bruce J. Standen
Director, Economics and Finance,
Australian Meat and Livestock Corporation
The diversity of employment opportunities that agricultural economists have found has always surprised me. A casual reflection upon the current positions of fellow graduates of the 1960s identifies academics, teachers, commodity traders, bankers; bureaucrats, analysts and advisers of both the public and corporate sectors; lobbyists and primary producers. All of these are more or less engaged in the practice of their earlier academic training. In addition, of course, there are perhaps as many who have become publicans, restaurateurs, furniture restorers, layabouts and the like who no doubt have drawn on their training as agricultural economists, but who, however, could hardly be described as engaging in professional practice.

Despite the diversity of employment of agricultural economists in Australia, an element of cohesion exists which allows the identification of a professional ethic or paradigm which distinguishes a profession. A couple of factors have contributed to this cohesion.

The first, and probably most important, is the similarity in curriculum and standards between agricultural economics departments in universities around Australia. This is not surprising given that remarkably few faculty staff are not the product of an agricultural economics department of some other Australian university. Insularity and mediocrity have been avoided by additional overseas academic training and teaching experience of department staff but common origins have contributed to common interests and common standards.
From this has flowed a common identity amongst agricultural economists.

The second factor has been the Australian Agricultural Economics Society. The Society has provided a forum for the debate and communication of the endeavours of agricultural economists and others for about as long as the existence of agricultural economics here at Armidale. The standards to which the Society has aspired have been high without being elitist; it has fostered a sense of fellowship as well as the pursuit of excellence.

A third factor has undoubtedly been the genius, perspicacity and style of founding practitioners such as Crawford, Campbell and Lewis – to name just a few of that remarkable group who have continued to inspire a generation of agricultural economists to pursue the ideals forged in the early 1950s.

There is an argument that the description "agricultural economics" now too narrowly defines the ambit of professional interest and experience of those originally trained in the discipline. Indeed, many in professional practice, including those holding membership of the Society, are only distantly involved in agricultural issues and some not at all. Agricultural production, marketing and policy-making have been fertile fields in which agricultural economists have exercised their skills but many have found it intellectually and financially rewarding to apply the same skills to other sectors and problems. Those who retain their interest in the literature of agricultural economics and maintain membership of the Society realise the wider application of its approaches and methods.

While the application of economics to agriculture has been the distinguishing feature of the profession, the key elements in the training and therefore in the capacities of agricultural economists are not specific to any particular sector. These elements are, I believe:

(i) a thorough grounding in production economics and other related fields of microeconomic theory of neo-classical economics;

(ii) a capacity for empirical research in the sense of an ability to apply the models and structures of
microeconomics to a very wide range of real world problems and issues;

(iii) a concern for the practical application of results and prescriptions.

It is hardly surprising that agricultural economics graduates having these skills have moved into employment not associated with agriculture. The structure of the economy has shifted significantly over the past twenty-five years and with it have come significant shifts in sectoral demands for skills of the sort that agricultural economists have acquired. At the time the Agricultural Economics Department was established at the University of New England and the Australian Agricultural Economics Society was formed, the agricultural sector figured much more prominently in the Australian economy. The study of its processes and problems promised and undoubtedly realised larger payoffs than could be achieved for other sectors. Today that assertion cannot be so easily accepted. Furthermore, the contribution that the profession has already made to improving the efficiency of production and marketing and to raising the level of policy debate has been considerable. Thus the incentives to shift the application of our professional skills to fields not related to agriculture are likely to be increasing.

What are some of the implications of this Diaspora of agricultural economists within Australia and internationally?

One implication, perhaps superficial, is that the profession does not do itself sufficient justice in continuing to use the description "agricultural economics". A description which more adequately identifies the ambit of interests of the wider paradigm is difficult to find. Because groupings of interests now exist around transport economics, labour economics and more recently business economics, any description such as "applied economics" connotes a catch-all of little informational value. Worse still, such a change would discard the valuable tradition of achievement which has distinguished the pursuit of the discipline in Australia.

However, more serious consequences are possible if the ambit of interests of those constituting the current professional paradigm are, or appear to be, too narrowly circumscribed. The view has been expressed that the formation in recent years of the Farm Management Society
and the Society of Business Economists is an indication of an emerging loss of identity by the agricultural economics profession. I am not convinced that this is the case. The development of such separate groupings is more a measure of the increasing breadth and depth of economics as an applied discipline in Australia and an increasing need for specialisation as a result.

However, any prospect of the deterioration and eventual disintegration of the paradigm deserves some assessment of the benefits which it generates. The profession, largely through the Society and the common interests and standards of the university departments, provides a forum for the debate of ideas, a place to register and communicate advances in knowledge, and a collective aspiration for excellence. These are tangible benefits accruing both to society generally and to members of the profession. If the loss of these benefits can be avoided then the means to do so deserve our attention.

The Council of the Agricultural Economics Society is aware that the Society must be responsive to any shift in interests of the membership. Membership has been well maintained over the years but the Society has looked for opportunities to ensure that this continues. Currently the Society is assessing the status of the Journal and whether it caters for the interests of sufficient of the membership. The view has been expressed that the Society fails to provide an avenue for the publication of pieces of work which are less substantial, more pragmatic and perhaps less rigorous than the type of work which is currently published in the Journal. The argument is that by far the majority of members are engaged in occupations which do not allow them to produce substantial, polished pieces of work. They may, however, have the opportunity to produce shorter pieces and many may see merit in their publication. In the past, the Review provided such a forum but an apparent shift in editorial policy towards that of the Journal has resulted in a narrowing of the opportunity for members of the profession to have material published. A clearer separation of the functions of the Journal from those of the Review could well broaden the scope of professional literature in Australia and be one means by which the interests of the profession could be attained.

My main concern is that because the description "agricultural economist" inadequately describes the capacities of graduates in the discipline it may entice too few good
students into so-called "agricultural economics" at university. The description to many people suggests a course of study which directs students along a narrow career path in a declining (relatively) economic sector. My contacts with metropolitan high-school students discussing careers suggest almost complete ignorance of the discipline and of the career prospects it opens. Experience with recruiting staff to both the N.S.W. Department of Agriculture and the AMLC suggests that the agricultural economics graduate with a well-structured degree is more capable at an early stage in his/her career of independently undertaking sound analysis of real-world economic issues than are most economics graduates. Where the well-structured degree includes training in the application of economic principles and methods to real-world issues, the graduate easily fits into occupations which require a capacity for analysis. This observation is supported by the number of agricultural economists who have risen to senior research and executive positions in both private and public sectors.

However, good agricultural economists within a decade of graduation are hard to find out there in the market place. This observation supports my earlier concern that too few good students are entering agricultural economics at university. There is a real "seller's market" each year for the top graduates of all Australia's agricultural economics departments. On the other hand, any advertisement for an economic analyst's position with the AMLC, for example, attracts applications from a very large number of agricultural economics graduates of mediocre ability and with poorly structured degrees. This is fairly typical, I understand, with advertisements for positions with other public and private sector organisations. Such graduates lack the training and ability to make good analysts and advisers and, from discussions with them, it seems their career prospects are fairly bleak.

The big challenge to university departments therefore appears to me to be (i) to find ways of enticing a greater number of capable students into courses currently constituting agricultural economics degrees; and (ii) to exclude less capable students who do themselves and the reputations of agricultural economics departments no good by undertaking poorly structured degrees with low levels of achievement.

Let me sum up:
1. The professional grouping of agricultural economists, especially via the Agricultural Economics Society, clearly provides tangible benefits but to a diminishing proportion of agricultural economists in Australia. Reasonable efforts should be made to ensure that the professional grouping is attractive to as many as possible consistent with the ideals and values which provide cohesion to the professional grouping.

2. The career prospects for competent graduates with well-structured degrees remain very attractive, yet a diminishing number appears to be coming out of universities. Even fewer with postgraduate training at master's degree level seem to be entering the job market.

3. In celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of agricultural economics at New England, an important issue which deserves consideration is the apparent decline in the capacity of this, and other universities, to attract greater numbers of competent students.
How I Became an Agricultural Economist

Professor Sir John Crawford
Chancellor,
Australian National University
This will not be a profound or learned address; the talk is personal - hence its title. I agree to tell it only because I am proud of some of the events in which I tried to play a creative role. What I call The Tale is a part of the story of the development of agricultural economics in Australian universities and, not least, of the establishment of the BAE in Canberra, in all of which there were many others involved, including such people as Professor Wadham (Melbourne), Professor Watt (Sydney), Mr McKerihan (Rural Bank of N.S.W.) and Dr Ian Clunies Ross (CSIR). My own personal interest and involvement in agricultural economics grew almost as the result of a series of sometimes quite unrelated steps - some more important than others. Indeed, if this story is any guide, one could develop a theory of history as a series of accidental events!

Let me mention those steps which, I hope, will emphasise the importance of events in one's life - some chance, some of more deliberate intent - and which not merely led me into agricultural economics, but also played some considerable part in the establishment of the BAE.

***

The Tale

I was not a farm boy, but did spend some holidays with farming uncles in the Wellington-Dubbo area and with farming friends in the north-west of N.S.W., most notably Mr A. Heath of Curlewis.
My real dreams were frustrated. Not having been warned, I did no Latin and hence, under the matriculation rules of 1928, could not become a doctor or a lawyer — my two dreams! But all was not lost: at Sydney High I had "done" economics (= Cannan: Wealth) and was very impressed by two points:

Even Robinson Crusoe had to allocate his time between competing ends; and

Malthus' use of the law of diminishing returns and Cannan's stress on productivity as a solution (not to mention new lands!).

The problem of population pressure has plagued me all my working life (and I am afraid my later classes got a lot of this with India, as the greatest single case for Malthusians to study, thrown in for good measure!).

After school I became a clerk in the N.S.W. Crown Solicitor's Office — hardly fertile ground for a budding economist. But, despite my environment, I maintained my determination to do the B.Ec. as an evening student in four years. My horizons were widened by the B.Ec. course under the guidance of Professor Mills, H.D. Black and R.B. Madgwick. However, Malthus would not go away and, as I have indicated, he remained at the core of much of my professional life. A large part of my later work with the World Bank in the 1960s and '70s was again with India, but Africa also provided much field material.

The next big step (I omit a significant period (1932–3) of teaching in Temora) was the award to me of the Walter and Eliza Hall Economics Research Fellowship at Sydney University. Alas!, I took on the rather sterile research task of measuring tariff levels. (I shall not daily on this terrible mistake, but the work is available to anyone interested in economic history.)

The real challenge occurred during my tenure of the Fellowship:

Memo: Mills to Crawford — "Prof Watt wants agricultural economics in his Faculty [Agriculture]: go and give it!"
I did, in 1934 I think, and easily the best result by 1941 was K.O. Campbell – who didn't need my help to get his First. I am afraid the course was elementary first-year economics – again with Malthus thrown in, but plus at last some real farm examples provided by the Rural Bank.

In December 1935, I joined the Rural Bank as Economic Adviser. Here I developed a close relationship with the Bank's valuers – a highly competent group who taught me much in the field of farm management analysis.

Then came for me the big opportunity, challenge and experience: a Commonwealth Fund Service Fellowship to the U.S.A! This was an award made by the New York–based Harbison Foundation (called the Commonwealth Fund)* amongst whose awards were five for public servants in British dominions. The award provided:

nine months in the United States Department of Agriculture as a de facto member of BAE!! (My nominal base was the Brookings Institute, but a letter of introduction to Harry Wallace, Secretary of Agriculture, gave me a much more stimulating base for the study of agricultural economics);

five–six months' travel by car in the Great Plains of the U.S.A. – observing the "New Deal" at work, the savage foreclosure policies of insurance companies, and the activities of county agents;

some six–eight months at Harvard as "Visiting Scholar". (There I had the good fortune to work with Alvin Hansen and John D. Black and Ken Galbraith. There too my first, rather tactless, contribution was to correct J.D. Black on an egregious error in his measurement of the "size of farms" in Australia.)

As a result of these experiences, I became strongly convinced that agricultural economics had a rightful and needed place in Australian universities, and that there should be an Australian BAE.

* I am glad to say that Tom Strong, Jack Lewis and Paul Phillips later followed my footsteps in this respect.
I came back to War, still in its more or less "phoney" stage, in 1940 and, in 1941, joined the Division of Agricultural Economics in the N.S.W. Department of Agriculture. I would like to note here that the N.S.W. Government (via both political parties), alone of the Australian states, was a constant seeker of Commonwealth cooperation and leadership in agricultural economic studies. Nor were the two Premiers concerned (Mair and McKell) idle in developing the subject.

In 1942 came War Organisation and Industry, followed by Postwar Reconstruction and the Bureau of Agricultural Economics - formally recognised as such by Mr Reg Pollard in 1944 in spite of opposition from the Commonwealth Department of Commerce and Agriculture and from Treasury. Both, together with the Public Service Board, preferred either "Division of Marketing" or "Division of Agricultural Economics".

In 1950 McEwen moved for an "Independent Cost Finding Tribunal". I helped him discover, however, the importance of the BAE and the fact that his Tribunal de facto existed. The BAE survived.

I became Secretary of the Department of Commerce and Agriculture in 1950 and moved to the Department of Trade in January 1956. I left the Service in 1960 and, in more or less related fields both here and abroad, have been wandering ever since. During those wanderings, however, the most fruitful and challenging work I did was in the capacity of Adviser (mainly for India), then of Senior Adviser on Agricultural Policy, to the World Bank.

It will not now surprise you that I found Malthus and Cannan much illuminated in the course of my visits in the field.

***

Many of you will notice that in this race through my life I have skipped certain events and people of great importance, one of whom was Ian Clunies Ross, a strong supporter of the BAE. He was quite open about its location, only wanting it to be in a position to influence both agricultural research and government policy.

There was a considerable controversy as to where the
BAE should be located. A strong case existed for the University of New England, but the advantages of being near the seat of power won the day. Nevertheless, I believe the open discussion aided the development of agricultural economics in Armidale, a development which has paid off handsomely - through New England graduates - in the BAE, in various departments, and in industry, as well of course as in its contribution to worldwide agricultural research activities and to the work of the World Bank.

My horizons for the BAE have not been, and are not, limited to Australia. I believe that, alongside the universities, it could play a direct role in Asia and the Pacific - if its political masters would agree. If not, we will have to continue to urge its members to go to universities and to the ADB, IBRD, and so on. I am sure that Helen Hughes, the new Director of the Development Studies Centre at the ANU, will push this line...

Finally, I continue to note with pleasure the way agricultural economics graduates in Australia prosper. I especially appreciate the way senior BAE people - Geoff Miller is a recent example - find their way up the Civil Service and into statutory bodies. It is a tribute to the reality that underlies their work.

Let me stop there - with the warning that my archival studies are only just under way! If any Ph.D. student at the UNE wants to write the story up (with appropriate hindsight criticism) he will get all the help I can give.
Symposium Participants
Other Symposium participants were:

K. Anderson, B.Ag.Bc.(Hons) (1971)
B. Arnold, B.Ag.Bc. (1981)
M.S. Beasley, M.Bc. (1974)
R. Boyer, B.Ag.Bc. (1971)
K. Bramma, B.Ag.Bc. (1983)
P. Bruyn, B.Ag.Bc. (1977)
B. Buffier, M.Bc. (1973)
B. Chick, Dip.Ag.Bc. (1975)
C. Clark, B.Ag.Bc.(Hons) (1975)
G. Connolly
J.L. Dillon*
P.J. Drake*
P. Drane †
J. Dwarkin, Ph.D. (1984)
C. Eveleigh, B.Ag.Bc. (1972)
N. Ferris*
B. Fisher
B. Fleming, Ph.D. (1982)*
P. Ford, B.Ag.Bc. (1970)
D.M. Gibson, B.Ag.Bc. (1969)
J. Gibson, B.Sc.Ag.(Hons) (1983)
R. Glover, B.Ag.Bc. (1977)
J. Greenwood, B.Ag.Bc. (1967)

* denotes UNB staff member at time of Jubilee
† denotes former UNB staff member
G. Gregory*
G. Griffith, B.Ag.Ec.(Hons) (1972)
J. Griffith, B.Ag.Ec. (1967)
B. Griffiths, B.Ag.Ec. (1967)*
F.H. Gruen
J. Guise, Ph.D. (1973)*
I. Harrison, M.Ec. (1978)
D. Harvey, B.Ag.Ec. (1984)
A. Hutchison, B.Ag.Ec. (1969)
J. Hutchison, B.Ag.Ec.(Hons) (1969)
D.C. Jackson, B.Ag.Ec.(Hons) (1981)
G. James*
F. Jarrett
R. Jensen
J. Johnston, B.Ag.Ec.(Hons) (1972)
I.W.S. Knight, B.Ag.Ec. (1968)
R. Lacey, B.Ag.Ec.(Hons) (1976)*
G.L. Lane, B.Ag.Ec.(Hons) (1980)
A. Lloyd
J. Longmire, B.Ag.Ec.(Hons) (1973)
S. Lucas*
D. Lugton, B.Ag.Ec. (1971)
T.G. MacAulay*
G.L. McClymont*
J.P. Makeham*
R. Mauldon
I. Murdock, B.Ag.Ec. (1977)
R.S. Neale*
D. Norton, M.Ec. (1977)
W. Ogilvie, Dip.Ag.Ec. (1972)
K. Parton, Ph.D. (1980)*
R.A. Pearse, Ph.D. (1969)*
R.A. Powell, Ph.D.*
C. Price, B.Ag.Ec. (1972)
E. Price, M.Ec. (1970)
J. Quilkey, Ph.D. (1975)
B. Reece*
R. Richardson, B.Ag.Ec. (1967)
A. Rickards, Dip.Ag.Ec. (1968)
A. Rose*
B. Rweyemera
J.M. Schofield, B.Ag.Ec. (1968)
S. Strong, B.Ag.Ec.(Hons) (1969)
J.A. Stuckey, B.Ag.Ec.(Hons) (1972)
T. Takayama†
M. Thomas †
D. Trebeck, M.Ec. (1972)
L. Trethowan, M.Ec. (1978)
M.B. Tyrrell, B.Ag.Ec. (1973)
I. Whan, B.Ag.Ec. (1973)
V. Wright*
R. Young, B.Ag.Ec. (1981)
Selected Apologies
Stephen Hill, B.Ag.Ec. (1967), Managing Director, Kimberley Seeds Pty Ltd, Osborne Park, W.A.:  

I regret being unable to make the Silver Jubilee ... I have to be in Adelaide to collect my BHP 1983 Australian Steel Award [for the "Kimseed Revegetation Machinery"] but would love to have got to Armidale ...


CONGRATULATIONS ON SILVER JUBILEE. AFRICA NEEDS TOP ARMIDALE GRADUATES. MASSIVE CELEBRATION HERE AT LOCAL BRUYN'S SATURDAY.

Bob Officer, M.Ag.Ec. (1968), Professor of Finance, Monash University:  

I would dearly like to be able to attend the Silver Jubilee of the Department. I owe a lot to it and those who were associated with it in the early years ... Unfortunately, other commitments - No! Not the Grand Final - prevent me from being able to attend. I hope the weekend is a splendid success and you have enough teetotallers to drive the "gentlemen" around after the heavy emotion and nostalgia are swept aside with libation.

Glenn Roff, Dip.Ag.Ec. (1972), Education Consultant, Catholic Education Office, Dubbo:  

... Unfortunately, I have to be an apology but wish everyone all the best on the day. Although I'm not professionally associated with agricultural economics these days, I'll be forever grateful to the Department. In my Diploma ... I developed for the first time in my study a genuine enjoyment in learning. Predominantly, this was due to: (a) the open door policy of lecturers and tutors; (b) the relevance of the courses; (c) field days and a natural resources "excursion"; (d) the quality and collegiate nature of the personnel in the
Department. I'd suggest many principles were passed on in a "hidden curriculum" sense. I offer my thanks.

Bob Dumsday, Ph.D. (1974), Senior Lecturer, School of Agriculture, La Trobe University:

I have just been talking to Roley Piggott and mentioned that I had been trying to get the time to write to you concerning my absence from the Silver Jubilee celebrations. My explanations are long and boring but, as you know, that has never deterred me in the past and will not stop me now.

The first jolt to my plans to attend came when our laboratory manager pointed out that the date for the Jubilee was Grand Final Day in Victoria. I am told that I gave vent to my feelings on the matter in a telegram I sent you, so I won't dwell on them here. If my own team had been playing in the Grand Final I would have made the easy decision not to go to Armidale. Unfortunately, my team wasn't playing but this was the first time for several years that I had been able to get seats to the game.

Let me tell you I went through agony trying to make up my mind on the issue. At one point I had definitely decided to go to the game and wrote you and Roley notes explaining that Anderson, Standen and Freebairn were no match for Hawthorn vs. Essendon. While one (an animal scientist) of the many colleagues I consulted agreed with this stance, I came under heavy fire from secretaries, technical staff, spouse and parents, all of whom agreed that I was not living up to my personal and professional responsibilities. They forced me to withdraw the notes!

Subsequently, and unilaterally, my better half booked an excursion air-fare for myself which I thought might have to be taken up, given the above pressure. However, I hate waiting in airports (or anywhere else for that matter) and soon discovered that I would be stranded in Sydney for five hours between flights. I then asked Freebairn what he would be talking about at the Jubilee. All things considered, the Grand Final was looking pretty good again, so I cancelled the flight.

By now it was Wednesday evening and my spouse divulged that she did not have to work on Friday. The possibility of
Armidale being invaded by all the Dumsdays or, even better, by two of them freed of parental responsibilities, swung the evaluation back in favour of the Jubilee. My spouse had been holding down four jobs over the past three weeks and I thought she was due for a break! However, despite lengthy negotiations, spouse decided, quite firmly, that the trip would be too much and that she would get more rest at home. By Thursday morning I decided that I might drive the Yellow Peril to Armidale after all. (You may recall that this was my original intention.) During the previous night it had occurred to me that I may be able to get my contribution to the Balderstone commentary completed more easily if I stayed on at UNE where local distractants couldn't find me. But the Yellow Peril needed better headlights if this trip was to be made! At the garage they ran into trouble installing the headlights. That gave me time to think that a cassette deck would be a good idea so I asked them to install that too – a half-hour – one hour tops – was their estimate of the time involved. To cut a long story short, they managed to screw up the wiring throughout the van and it was 2 am Friday morning (!) before the whole thing was working again.

You may recall that 2 am Friday was the time the sixth race started in the America's Cup series. That ended the possibility of my attending the Jubilee: I watched the race through to its fantastic finish. Saturday was a disappointment – Essendon didn't turn up for the game. I spent a little time thinking of you chaps at the conference, but mostly I just drank and watched the crowd.

Saturday night the parents came over to watch the last race for the Cup. We got to bed at 4.30 am after it was called off – another disappointment, and I was really starting to wonder about my decision-making ability! Monday night it was tennis with the boys followed by another shot at the Cup – more disappointment – by this time even Freebairn's talk is beginning to look good. I DECIDE to stay up – with Gavin – to see it through. The race starts, but we end up trailing by 57 seconds – even more disappointment – by this time it was becoming numbing and I was at an all-time low! Why the hell didn't I go to Armidale!!

They round the fifth mark and I notice – or is it just my imagination? – that the sails on Liberty don't seem to be setting near as well as those on Australia II. The wind is fluky and seems to be favouring the Australian boat – I put
down the razor blades. The rest is mind-blowing, once-in-a-life-time, FANTASTIC history. It may have only just shaded the Silver Jubilee but it made me feel better about my decision-making ability. (It was also the first time since our return from the USA that it felt good to be an Australian, but that's another story, "mercifully" I hear you say.)

What I am trying to say is I missed not being with you people at the Jubilee but please try to ensure that the 50th Jubilee doesn't clash with Carlton winning their 34th Grand Final or Australia Z defending the Cup for the sixth time.

I heard the celebrations went very well. We hope to make the northern trip again next year so should see you before the next Jubilee. I must get back to the Boulderstone report, as spouse calls it. Regards to all.

*Lloyd Davies, B.Ag.Ec. (Hons.) (1975), Economist, Department of Agriculture, Dubbo:

Unfortunately, that weekend I plan to be planting melons - a part-time "hobby" I learnt from lecturers at that famous institution on the hill. I wish you every success, and regards to all.

*Y.A. Piyatissa, M.Ec. (1975), Deputy Director, Central Bank of Ceylon:

... your invitation has served to renew old friendships and to re-live some of my happy times in the Department. It has for instance revived my memories of the close relationship and understanding between the staff and the students at UNE, which happily seem to survive. I would, therefore, like to take this opportunity to wish you and the other staff members of the Department many more useful years of service to the Australian agricultural community and in particular to the developing countries of the world.