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COMMENT AND FAREWELL MESSAGE : REFLECTIONS ON A LOVE AFFAIR : A PERSONAL FAREWELL TO LEVSA

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Current trends transforming agriculture and rural society offer a package of new challenges to university departments of agricultural economics. Research, teaching and policy agendas in agriculture have shifted significantly in ways that should demand more and better outputs from professionals in this discipline. Limitations to meeting this challenge are explored and the logic developed to suggest that some of the most interesting and challenging years for South African agricultural economists lie just ahead. In a final section, the author bids farewell to friends and colleagues in LEVSA.

Die huidige tendense wat die landbou en landelike gemeenskap hervorm gee aanleiding tot 'n klomp nuwe uitdagings vir landbou-ekonomie departemente aan universiteite. Navorsing, onderrig en beleidsagendas binne die landbou het beduidend verskuif in opsigte wat meer en beter produksie van professionele persone in hierdie dissipline behoort te vereis. Aspekte wat die suksesvolle nastrewing van dié uitdagings beperk word ondersoek en die logiese afleiding word gemaak dat 'n aantal van die mees interessante en uitdagende jare vir Suid-Afrikaanse landbou-ekonomie voorlê. In 'n finale afdeling neem die outeur afskeid van vriende en kollegas in LEVSA.

Thoughts on the Meaning of the Agricultural Transition for University Departments of Agricultural Economics

The pace and magnitude of South Africa's agricultural and rural transformation do not need elaboration to the membership of LEVSA. Our clients of all types are still adapting to a decade of fundamental changes in policy and national direction that were well described by Vink (1993) in his presidential address of two years ago. This conference's theme, the role of the agricultural economist in the reconstruction process, recognizes that a major transformation is on-going and that we, as professionals, have important roles to play in that transformation.

Rural restructuring will continue and probably will accelerate. At the same time, it will diversify to include not only production agriculture but also the entirety of those dimensions that determine human welfare. Such basic change will be driven by several larger trends. Among these are:

- land reform, an accepted and central national goal,
- a newly empowered constituency which is largely poor and whose welfare is strongly influenced by issues of food security,
- continued fluidity in human movement, with migrant streams increasingly targeting intermediate and smaller towns in rural areas,
- fuller exposure to world markets and prices, and to internal and external competition,
- regionalization of governance,
- and, rural development initiatives under the RDP.

This short paper confines its reflections to the implications of present and future change for university departments of agricultural economics. I will also limit my remarks to things that seem fairly obvious, thus saving you and I both the tedium of loquacious profs.

First, in agricultural economics, we seem to be relatively successful in placing our graduates in useful and rewarding

employment. I believe our market is not yet saturated, perhaps even far from it. Looking to an expanding RDP as its delivery mechanisms begin to work, at the realization of effective provincial and local governance and at the promised "rural" components of almost every program in sight, it would seem that the demand curve for capable graduates in agricultural economics should be shifting rapidly to the right. This assumption cannot be wrong as long as most of the nation's poverty and deprivation remains concentrated in rural areas and as long as democratic government remains committed to resolving these problems.

From this perspective, we, as a profession, are probably not educating enough people in general, and obviously not enough blacks and women in particular. I believe that if our undergraduate output were increased by fifty percent for each of the next ten years, we would still not saturate the market. It is equally clear that doubling the output of postgraduate students would also serve the national need and again, there is no visible near term limit to absorptive capacity for these persons.

Second, with structural, economic and social transformations in agriculture and rural areas, the policy and program agenda has shifted. With the possible exception of the Post-graduate School of Agricultural and Rural Development at Tukkies, one must ask whether or not our curricula have adequately evolved to meet these new developments. To serve rural transformation, are we teaching enough of rural change, small-scale farming systems, rural governance and administration, community process and process leadership, land and resource economics, to name but a few? To accommodate market liberalization and the Uruguay round of GATT, are we teaching enough agribusiness, trade theory, forecasting and price theory, again just to name just a few? The list could be extended. Looking to the future along any of the larger trends noted above suggests new courses, new course content, new methods and new clients.

Perhaps there is a leadership role for LEVSA here. Rather than leave each institution to sort all this out for themselves, why not a LEVSA Task Force, commissioned by the association, to address the subject of changing needs and future goals in agricultural economics education and training. Not a large group, and certainly not the heads of departments as a group. Rather a smaller collection of

dedicated educators from among us, persons with a passionate commitment to teaching and an eclectic view of what is happening around us. And after assessing what the future might be and where our university departments would like to be positioned in it, the commission could develop a set of strategies for getting there, which we each could use as guidance.

Third, there will be continued pressures for rationalization within higher education. Even if there is no imposed mandate to rationalize, continued shrinkage in real funding for universities will force us to do it anyway. It is my firm belief that if each department of agricultural economics rationalizes strictly on internal considerations, then the integrity of the whole, our output as a discipline, is at risk. We could find each institution clinging tenaciously to the mainstream turf with which we are comfortable, shedding imaginative bits and pieces in our struggle to survive. As a whole, we then end up with too many departments cloning mainstream content and not enough pushing back the edges of curriculum content or applications which our now broadened mandate requires.

Woody Hayes, an American football coach, once said, 'the best defense is a good offence.' I would suggest those words hold true for agricultural economics education at this moment in South Africa. Let us be proactive regarding rationalization. In other words, let us do it to ourselves following our own vision before it is done to us by others with visions of their own. Again, I see a possible lead role for LEVSA, another task team, or perhaps a phase 2 for the team proposed above.

Meeting these twin challenges will not be easy. As a discipline, we face an urgent need to expand and diversify our outputs of students and research and we face it during a period of declining real resources. It is a challenge requiring the concerted attention of the most creative minds available.

Fourth, the need for outreach to our farm constituents, old and new, is common cause within the association. I would suggest that there is an equal need for greater linkages between our institutions, the collection of universities offering agricultural economics degrees or majors. The past has left a legacy of severe dualism within this community just as it has in other spheres of life. Certainly this is a case where enhanced capacities for the one, enhance the whole as well. And in my view, the most effective capacity building occurs in collegial interaction.

Team teaching, exchange of teachers, joint degrees, mutual accreditation of curricula and collaborative research or community service are all options that we have thought about. The vehicle of sister university designations has potential and some obvious pairings come to mind, e.g., universities of Fort Hare and Stellenbosch, the North and Pretoria, the North-West and the Free State, and others.

There is another needed relationship, at least for those of us outside Pretoria, and that is closer ties to government at all its current and emerging tiers. As noted above, whether in agriculture, land, water or rural development, government's agenda has shifted. And it has shifted squarely into the arena in which agricultural economists have comparative advantages. This will affect the demand for our graduates and the demand for our services, to say nothing of course content and research foci. Government needs us now, more than before. They just don't know how badly they need us yet. Let us help them discover this and then join with each other into strong interactive relationships. If we are to serve

the nation, we cannot ignore the channel of working through and with the nation's government.

Fifth, one of the forces that drives and structures incentives in the universities is the funding formulae for higher education. There are at least two significant problems with these formulae which affect our profession, and I think we can and must do something about them. The first of these is that service (dicenslewing) is completely missing from the funding equation. Doesn't this gap affect agricultural economists perhaps more than any of the other disciplines in the agricultural sciences? And if so, do we not have a mandate to get this changed? Perhaps through LEVSA, or with LEVSA and the Committee of University Principals? Service, in part, defines our discipline. When the incentive system works against service, then we have a generic problem that affects the discipline as a whole.

The second problem derived from funding formulae lies in the incentives created by the subsidy scheme that rewards research publications appearing in accredited outlets. Portions of this subsidy are allocated to individual authors and become essentially discretionary income for research related purposes. Shared authorship means splitting the pie. Thus the scheme creates an incentive structure that works against team work, multidisciplinary and inter-institutional collaboration. It also provides an incentive for some authors to throw everything but the kitchen sink into the publication review process. Since our review processes are not foolproof, the occasional piece appears which does not represent the profession well. Apart from the latter, we must commit to working to offset the more generic problems, acting selflessly if need be. A sister university association cannot thrive without research collaboration. And, more fundamentally, interdisciplinary problem solving research is another defining characteristic of agricultural economists. We cannot let a reward system lead us away from that.

Sixth, members of LEVSA and the agricultural economics departments produce some very good research. In the last few years, new knowledge created by this group has contributed in many major ways to society's advancement. On the other side of the coin, the standard deviation is larger and the mean a little lower than desired where research quality is concerned. The necessary skills are in place and the issues out there begging for our best. We can do better. Each of us must accept the challenges not only of a larger collective research output but to achieving higher quality as well. Particularly worrying is the frequency with which simple statistical measures, such as the significance of differences between means in survey data, are ignored or misinterpreted.

Lastly, any serious researcher in agricultural economics knows that our statistical base is weak, flawed or sometimes just plain missing. Part of this can be traced to institutional, behavioural and policy influences of the past. Perhaps the greater part, however, can be traced to the agenda shift mentioned above. Policy analysis and program design today require data and statistical concepts that were unknown in this country only ten years back. In this observation lies the chance for innovation and excitement. If agricultural economics research is going to rise to the challenges of our country's new agenda, then do we not have the right, and indeed, the mandate to demand vast improvements in the statistical system that is our life blood? We must recognize that research always leads the statistical system. We cannot shrink from new research questions for lack of data. Rather, we must grasp the issues and insist that the statistical

system make the changes needed to support us, and make them quickly.

In closing, the question has been much debated in the United States: "Has agricultural economics lost its *raison d'être* as a separate discipline?" In America, the theory and methods of economics and agricultural economics have converged, the farm population has shrunk to a tiny fraction of the whole, and farming has become more the business of the firm and less the craft of a peasantry. Bonnen (1992) defines the discipline's original taproot as farm management economics and problem solving approaches, and suggests that this root has withered in America. Houck (1992) suggests that the term "agricultural" means more to agricultural economists than to those outside our inner circle. He asserts that we are, at the core, "applied economists, – consuming economic theory rather than producing it, – adapting it for our purposes of solving or illuminating real world problems."

In South Africa, the question "whither the discipline" can and must be asked with some urgency, not because we are in danger of losing our constituency but precisely because that constituency has now been vastly broadened, diversified and the relevant issues now lie in arenas in which few of us are familiar. The danger here is that we might cling blindly and too long to just the taproot of commercial agriculture without seeing that shifting tides require adventitious roots as well. The stable ecology of coastal mangroves comes to mind.

In comparison, the environment and practice of our discipline in South Africa differs from the United States. If agricultural economists truly are skilled in applying economic theory and method to real world problems, if we build on our interdisciplinary capacities and strengths, and if the agricultural and rural agenda has shifted squarely into our arena, then it is very likely that when we look back on the next twenty years, we will find that they have been the Golden Years of Agricultural Economics in South Africa. I wish each of you who will be part of that journey *alles van die beste!*

A Farewell Hug or Handshake

The title of this brief paper goads me on to one last step, a bit of free form verse, a love poem if you will. By way of background, the first time I met enough LEVSA members to call it a group was at the regional conference of the International Association of Agricultural Economists in Swakopmund, Namibia. There, just three months after Namibia's independence, we met to explore the topic of Restructuring Southern Africa's Agriculture. The opening function was a cocktail party, hosted by the mayor of Swakopmund on an ancient jetty sticking out into the crashing waves and ocean mists of the Atlantic. While Swakop becomes a metaphor in my little verse, it is dedicated to each and every one of you, whether you were there or not, and to LEVSA that brings us all together.

Reflections on a Love Affair : A Personal Farewell to LEVSA

*When first we met, in Swakop,
you found me
a man burned out and going nowhere,
cycling and recycling through a never ending list of airports
on assignment,
always flying from somewhere, but never flying to --*

*When first we met in Swakop,
I found you
all starry eyed with fledgling hope,
a reconstructed LEVSA,
seeing a new future through the Swakop mist,
and through the eyes of someone named Simon.
Just arrogant enough to say
"Together we will change this land."*

*And that you did --
in RDPs and land reform,
in FSPs and water rights,
in market change and labour law,
farm management, environment,
in basic needs and ethics,
even SAMs and CGEs.*

*And in the process, out you reached
'cross once forbidden lines.
Grabbed hands with others not like you
and struggled on together,
making little waves and ripples
'til all of you created
a tidal wave of change.*

*For unknown reasons, someone reached to me.
Not one, not twenty,
fifty of you, maybe more.
Like kids back on that beach at Swakop,
we built our castles from the sand
then fought against resentful waves
until those castles stood as stone.*

*And in those castles, in that fight
in all the times we won
and even when we lost,
our spirits soared in unison,
communion blessed by LEVSA.*

*When next we meet in Swakop
we will stand upon that jetty,
lift a glass,
and pause in reverend wonder,
at what God, through us, has done.*

*So let me part, my friends, by saying,
of the times we had together,
of the great times and the good,
and even those when all we did
was slog along to nowhere,
Each of us, and what we offered,
would have been diminished
had we tried it all alone.*

*Students, friends and colleagues,
co-authors and co-workers
bosses, mentors, mentees
and students, once again.
For after all
you are the alpha and omega
for academics such as I,*

*You renewed my life
by making me
a part of yours.
Each of us, in little ways or large
passed on our fledgling hope to what they call
The Rainbow Nation.*

Though it seems like only moments

*Though it seems like only moments
my five years with you are gone.
I will carry what we had together,
with me -- always!*

*From the bottom of my heart, my friends
I thank you!*

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NUWE LEVSA BESTUURSKOMITEE

'n Nuwe bestuurskomitee is tydens die algemene jaarvergadering in Bloemfontein op 27 September 1995 verkies. Die nuwe bestuur sien as volg daaruit.

President :	Dr Gerhard Backeberg
Vise-President :	Dr Thomas Naledzani
Oud-President :	Prof Johan van Zyl
Agrekon redakteur :	Prof Jan Groenewald
Addisionele lede:	Mark Darroch Hans Janse van Rensburg Herman van Schalkwyk (1996 konferensie) Gavin Fraser (1997 konferensie)
Sekretaris:	Rolf-Joachin Otto

PRYSWENNERS

Soos gebruiklik is 'n aantal LEVSA-lede met pryse vir uitstaande bydrae in die vakgebied vereer. Die volgende pryswenners tydens die jaarlikse LEVSA dinee bekroon:

Trust Bank toekening vir die beste magister verhandeling:

Mnr. G.R. Barlow, Universiteit van Natal vir die verhandeling getiteld: "An analysis of soil conservation policy for selected commercial farms in Kwazulu-Natal"

SJJ de Swardt/ Agrekon prys vir die beste artikel in Agrekon:

JHF Botes, DJ Bosch en LK Oosthuizen vir die artikel : "Elicitation of risk preferences for irrigation farmers in the Winterton area: Wealth risk versus annual income risk" gepubliseer in Agrekon Vol 33 no 1, Maart 1994: p1-7

Standard Bank toekening vir die beste gepubliseerde artikel (in 'n reeks van landbou-ekonomiese tydskrifte):

Prof MC Lyne vir die artikel "Ownership and control of Maori land: Some lessons for South Africa" gepubliseer in Development Southern Africa, Vol 11 no 4, November 1994.

NEW AEASA MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

A new management committee was elected during the annual general meeting held in Bloemfontein on 27 September 1995. The new management is as follows:

President :	Dr Gerhard Backeberg
Vice-President :	Dr Thomas Naledzani
Past-President :	Prof Johan van Zyl
Editor of Agrekon:	Prof Jan Groenewald
Additional members:	Mark Darroch Hans Janse van Rensburg Herman van Schalkwyk (1996 conference) Gavin Fraser (1997 conference)
Secretary:	Rolf-Joachin Otto

PRIZE WINNERS

A number of AEASA members were awarded prizes at the annual AEASA dinner. The prize winners are the following:

Trust Bank award for the best masters thesis:

Mr. G.R. Barlow, University of Natal for his thesis entitled: "An analysis of soil conservation policy for selected commercial farms in Kwazulu-Natal"

SJJ de Swardt/ Agrekon prize for the best article in Agrekon:

JHF Botes, DJ Bosch and LK Oosthuizen for the article : "Elicitation of risk preferences for irrigation farmers in the Winterton area: Wealth risk versus annual income risk" published in Agrekon Vol 33 no 1, March 1994: p1-7

Standard Bank award for the best published article (in a range of agricultural economics journals):

Prof MC Lyne for the article "Ownership and control of Maori land: Some lessons for South Africa" published in Development Southern Africa, Vol 11 no 4, November 1994.

Volkskas Bank toekening vir die beste gekeurde referaat:

DN Thompson en MC Lyne vir die referaat getiteld : "Is tenure secure in communal areas? Some empirical evidence from KwaZulu-Natal".

Opstelkompetisie

Die wenner van jaar se opstelkompetisie is Mnr JJ Viljoen van die Universiteit van Stellenbosch vir die opstel getiteld: "Agriculture in the Western Cape : An engine of growth".

Volkskas Bank award for the best contributed paper:

DN Thompson and MC Lyne for the paper entitled : "Is tenure secure in communal areas? Some empirical evidence from KwaZulu-Natal".

Essay competition

The winner of this year's essay competition is Mr JJ Viljoen, University of Stellenbosch for the essay entitled: "Agriculture in the Western Cape : An engine of growth".

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History

The IAAE was established in 1929 by fifty agricultural economists from eleven countries who met at Dartington Hall, Devon, England, UK. Countries represented at that conference included Canada, China, Denmark, Finland, Germany, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, Trinidad, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Those attending concluded periodic conferences would benefit agricultural economists throughout the world by increasing their knowledge of other nations' challenges and by promoting mutual understanding and goodwill.

Organization

IAAE is governed by a council of officers and member delegates. National branches and area branches, made up of members in specific countries or a group of countries, promote the objectives of IAAE within their country or area. Each branch designates a member as a representative to provide liaison between its members and the IAAE officers.

The elected officers of IAAE are president, president elect, past president, vice president-program, secretary-treasurer, plus two additional members. The elected officers comprise the executive committee which acts for the council between council meetings. The officers appoint a proceedings editor and an international journal editor-in-chief, both of whom serve as *ex-officio* executive committee members.

Member Benefits

Publications

Newsletters and other membership publications help members share ideas and facilitate communication.

- Biannual *IAAE Newsletter* contains information about IAAE activities and publications and other international events and opportunities.
- Proceedings of the triennial international conference contain invited and plenary session papers.
- *IAAE Occasional Papers* are contributed papers and poster abstracts of the conference.
- *Members Bulletin*, issued triennially, contains conference discussion group reports and biographical sketches of honorary life members.
- *IAAE Directory* is a list of current members.

- *Agricultural Economics: The Journal of the International Association of Agricultural Economists*, six issues per year published in collaboration with Elsevier Science Publishers, is available to members at a substantial discount.

To submit manuscripts, send four copies to the publisher at the following address:

Editorial Secretariat
Agricultural Economics
P.O. Box 181
NL-1000 AD Amsterdam
Netherlands

Conferences

The international conference is held every third year, enabling members to present ideas for discussion by colleagues from around the world. A broad range of agricultural and rural topics is addressed in conference sessions. Past conference sites have been: 1929 — Totnes, Devon, England, U.K.; 1930 — Ithaca, New York, USA; 1934 — Bad Eilsen, Germany; 1936 — St. Andrews, Fife, Scotland, UK; 1938 — Ste. Anne de Bellevue, Que., Canada; 1947 — Totnes, Devon, England, UK; 1949 — Stresa, Italy; 1952 — East Lansing, Michigan, USA; 1955 — Helsinki, Finland; 1958 — Mysore, India; 1961 — Cuemavaca, Mexico; 1964 — Lyon, France; 1967 — Sydney, Australia; 1970 — Minsk, USSR; 1973 — São Paulo, Brazil; 1976 — Nairobi, Kenya; 1979 — Banff, Alberta, Canada; 1982 — Jakarta, Indonesia; 1985 — Malaga, Spain; 1988 — Buenos Aires, Argentina; 1991 — Tokyo, Japan; 1994 — Harare, Zimbabwe.

The *XXIII International Conference of Agricultural Economists* — "Food Security, Diversification and Resource Management: Refocusing the Role of Agriculture?" — will be held August 10-16, 1997, in Sacramento, California, USA.

Interconference symposia are organized on specialized topics according to symposium location. They are held approximately annually in years between the triennial international conference.

Travel

World travel in conjunction with the triennial meetings and associated tours provides members an opportunity to become better acquainted with colleagues from many countries; study agricultural and rural conditions in various nations; and gain firsthand knowledge of other peoples and their problems. Interconference symposia offer similar opportunities with fewer participants.