

THE FORMATION OF A NATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF PERSONS INTERESTED IN
THE APPLICATION OF GENETICS TO ANIMAL PRODUCTION

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HISTORY

The 3rd International Congress of SABRAO (Society for the Advancement of Breeding Researches in Asia and Oceania), held in Canberra in February 1977, provided the first forum where a significant proportion of the research workers in genetics and animal breeding in Australia met as a distinct group. Some 40 such workers from universities, CSIRO, and State Departments of Agriculture were present, and extremely valuable and stimulating discussions characterized the scientific sessions.

The obvious success of this meeting prompted the suggestion that there was a need for regular meetings, particularly in that many of these persons work individually or in small groups isolated from others with similar interests.

At an informal meeting convened by Associate Professor J.S.F. Barker (Chairman of the Farm Animals section of SABRAO) to consider this suggestion, it was agreed that while SABRAO should be actively supported by Australian research workers, its structure was not appropriate to provide a regular forum. Further, it was agreed that a local (i.e. Australian) organization, structured to generate more and better opportunities for communication, was necessary, and

Associate Professor J.S.F. Barker, Department of Animal Husbandry,
 University of Sydney,

Dr K. Hammond, Animal Genetics and Breeding Unit, NSW Department of
 Agriculture and University of New England, and

Dr P.D. Mullaney, Animal Research Institute, Victorian Department
 of Agriculture,

were asked by the meeting to act as a Steering Committee to formulate a proposal and circulate it to all interested persons. At this stage, it was envisaged that an essentially scientific society should be established.

However, an alternative possibility was recognized following the Workshop on Improving the Servicing of Animal Breeding Programs in Australia (Armidale, July 1977). Participants in the Workshop comprised research workers and representatives of all the animal industries (except poultry). Problems of communication between the research workers in genetics and animal breeding and the individual producers and their organizations (breed

societies, artificial breeding organizations etc.) were emphasized by the Workshop.

The Committee decided therefore that an organization specifically including breeders and industry organizations, as well as research workers, should be considered, as an alternative to a purely scientific society.

Rather than attempting to circulate all interested persons to obtain a consensus on the two possibilities, the Committee decided to present them to the first subsequent meeting at which a significant proportion of animal geneticists were present, viz. the 12th Biennial Conference of the Australian Society of Animal Production (ASAP), Melbourne, February 1978.

An informal meeting was held during this Conference, with the agreement of the Executive of ASAP Federal Council, and was attended by 25 persons.

The two proposals were discussed at length, and the meeting agreed unanimously:

1. That the formation of a national organization of persons interested in the application of genetics to animal production is necessary.
2. That such an organization should formally and specifically provide for membership by individual breeders and breeding organizations, by consultants, and by extension and research workers, i.e. *all* interested in the application of genetics to animal production.

The question of a name for the organization was discussed around that proposed by Hammond, viz. Australian Association of Animal Breeders and Geneticists, and others suggested during the discussion, viz. Australian Society for Genetics Applied to Animal Production; Australian Society of Animal Breeding; Australian Association for the Advancement of Animal Breeding. Discussion centred on the two terms "Association" and "Society" and more particularly, on whether two terms "breeders and geneticists" or "breeding and genetics" should be used rather than just one word to describe the area of interest. A vote on the question: "Do you favour the use of one term which groups all members, or two terms, identifying the two broad groups, irrespective of whether 'genetics' and 'breeding' or 'geneticists' and 'breeders' is used?" produced a 9:8 majority in favour of two terms.

The meeting agreed that the Steering Committee should:

1. Invite at least one industry representative to join the Committee, and invite corresponding members from each of the major centres of animal production in the country,
2. Decide on a tentative name and prepare a draft constitution,
3. Solicit members,
4. Establish the financial basis of the organization,
5. Stage an inaugural conference of the organization in 1979,
6. Hold a general meeting during this conference to approve a name for the organization, ratify a constitution and elect the office bearers.

Before its first meeting, the Steering Committee invited two industry representatives to join it, viz.

Mr R. Hawker of South Australia, a dairy, beef cattle and sheep breeder, and

Mr J. Litchfield of New South Wales, a beef cattle and sheep breeder.

At its first formal meeting (March 17, 1978) the Steering Committee resolved to invite Dr R.K. Ryan to join the Committee to broaden industry representation to the intensive animal industries (pigs and poultry).

JUSTIFICATION FOR THE FORMATION OF AN ASSOCIATION

* Australia has a number of major animal industries and the genetic change in the populations of each industry, with the exception of poultry, is determined by many people.

* As compared with other countries and with the exception of the poultry industry, the application of genetic principles to our animal industries has not been great, even though we have considerable resources to utilize.

* Recent increases in economic pressures are forcing each industry to derive greater productivity from the breeding herd/flock and this, together with recent advances in technology, the use of objective measurement, and the introduction or anticipated introduction of new breeds and strains have produced an increased interest in genetic improvement.

* There is tremendous potential for genetic improvement of productivity and reduction in costs of production. This contention is supported by a conclusion of the Workshop on Improving the Servicing of Animal Breeding Programs in Australia:

"Animal breeding programs have an important role to play in improving productivity in all Australian livestock industries."

and by a preliminary report of a major study being undertaken by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics:

"Improved technology obviously has an important contribution to make in stimulating productivity growth. Generally, technical advances in areas such as animal and plant (genetic) performance appear to offer the greatest potential pay-offs in improving incomes."

[B.A.E. 1978. The Australian Agricultural Economy: Annual Review. 1977-78. Canberra].

* The general level of information on the use of genetic principles amongst administrators and breeders is poor.

* No *regular formal* means exist for the exchange of information between local geneticists and breeders, nor even within each group. This point was emphasized by the informal meeting at the 3rd SABRAO Congress and at the Workshop on Improving the Servicing of Animal Breeding Programs in Australia, which concluded:

"Communication problems exist between all organizations and individuals concerned with breeding programs [in Australia], but particularly between animal geneticists and industry."

Of the possible organizations:

ASAP - it is generally recognized that discussions at meetings do not include regular in-depth exchange on individual scientific and technological disciplines of animal production.

SABRAO - it was recognized at the informal meeting of 'animal breeders' at the 3rd Congress that even with a proposed improvement to the local structure of SABRAO (appointment of a regional [Australia-wide] co-secretary), the SABRAO structure was in no way sufficient for the job required.

Australian Genetics Society - not an appropriate forum to achieve the intended objective.

* It is estimated that there are 90 to 100 geneticists and geneticists-in-training in Australia who are directly or indirectly concerned with animal genetics.

* It is estimated (conservatively) that the association could attract as ordinary members 60 geneticists (including geneticists-in-training), 100 industry representatives and producers, and 40 extension/consulting/teaching staff. In addition about 40 sustaining/corporate members should be attracted. This is a small national organization but, given a good financial structure, it could have a most important influence in improving communication and subsequently application of sound genetic principles to Australia's animal industries.

MEMBERSHIP

Ordinary Members:

It is envisaged that membership would encompass those interested in the application of genetics to animal production at the seed-stock and/or commercial level; and research workers, extension workers, educators and consultants interested in the application of genetics to animal production. Within these latter groups, some members may have major interests in other areas, and may not consider themselves primarily as professional geneticists.

Corporate/Sustaining Members:

Corporate or sustaining membership will be available to industry organizations such as breed societies, AB organizations, co-operative breeding groups, commercial pig and poultry breeding organizations and livestock agencies. The only difference between these two categories is in the annual membership fee which is higher for the latter. The type of membership these organizations elect to take would be at their own discretion, but it is expected that some would elect to take sustaining membership so as to offer greater support to the Association.

OBJECTIVES

1. To promote communication among all those interested in the application of genetics to animal production, particularly breeders and their organizations, consultants, extension workers, educators and geneticists.
2. To foster the application of genetics in animal production.
3. To promote the scientific study of animal breeding.
4. To hold regular Conferences to provide a forum for:
 - a) presentation of papers and in-depth discussions of general and industry-specific topics concerning the application of genetics in commercial animal production.
 - b) scientific discussions, and presentation of papers on completed research work and on proposed research projects.
5. To publish the proceedings of each Conference and circulate them to *all* members.

BENEFITS

To Individual Members:

* While it is not possible to produce specific recommendations or 'recipes' for breeding plans that are applicable for all herd/flock sizes and management systems, principles for the development of breeding plans can be specified. Discussion of these principles, consideration of particular case studies, and demonstration of breeding programs that are in use will all be of benefit to breeders.

* Geneticists will benefit from the continuing contact with other research workers in refreshing and updating their knowledge.

* The opportunity for contact and discussions between breeders and geneticists will be of benefit to both - for breeders as above and through the opportunity to involve geneticists in individual members' programs, and for geneticists in allowing for detailed discussion and appreciation of the practical management factors that often restrict full application of optimum breeding programs.

To Member Organizations:

* Many of the benefits to individual breeders will apply also to breeding organizations. In addition, there are benefits to be gained through co-ordination and integration of their efforts. Recognition of this should follow from understanding of common problems, and would lead to increased effectiveness of action and initiatives.

* Corporate and sustaining members can use the Association as a forum to float ideas aimed at improving and/or increasing services to their members.

General Benefits:

- * Membership of the Association may be expected to provide a variety of benefits, and through the members, indirect benefits to all the animal industries.
- * All members should benefit through increased recognition of problems both at the level of research and of application, and increased understanding of current approaches to their solution.
- * Well documented communication of gains to be realized through effective breeding programs will stimulate breeders and breeding organizations, allowing increased effectiveness of application and consequently increased efficiency of operation.
- * Increased recognition of practical problems and specific areas of major concern to individual industries should lead to increased relevance of applied research.
- * All breeders will benefit indirectly because of improved services offered by the organizations which service them.
- * The existence of the Association will increase appreciably the amount and use of factual information in public relations in the animal industries.
- * Association members will comprise a pool of expertise - at both the applied and research levels - and as such, individual members and the Association itself must have an impact on administrators at all levels of the animal industries and on Government organizations, leading to wiser decisions on all aspects of livestock improvement, and increased efficiency of animal production.

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