27/02/98

REPORT ON THE 6TH WORLD CONGRESS ON GENETICS APPLIED TO LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION

SARA MORROW

IERM

The 6th World Congress on Genetics Applied to Livestock Production (6wcgalp) was held at the University of New England, New South Wales, Australia from 11 - 16 January 1998. My reasons for attending the conference included the opportunity to present some of my work in a poster presentation, and to participate in the various sessions of this foremost international conference for animal breeding specialists.

The official opening on Sunday 11 January provided an opportunity to meet some old acquaintances and begin meeting many new people. Monday saw the start of the Scientific Program that was to run until Friday. The Plenary session consisted of three interesting and thought provoking talks, two of which were given by 'local' experts, Professor W. G. Hill (Edinburgh) and Professor G. Bulfield (Roslin). Naturally, references were made to Dolly the sheep during Professor Bulfield's talk, while Professor Hill spoke on inferences from evolutionary biology to livestock breeding. The third speaker, Dr. J. Graves was from Australia and presented an entertaining talk entitled 'The genetic value of weird mammals', referring to some of the indigenous species of Australia, including the kangaroo and duckbilled platypus.

Following the Plenary Session, up to five sessions ran concurrently throughout the week. The sessions that interested me the most included those on Sheep and Goat Breeding, Developmental Genetics, Growth and Efficiency, Dairy Cattle Breeding, Meat Quality, Animal Welfare, Genetics and the Environment and Disease Resistance. The presentations on x-ray Computed Tomography (CT) provided me with further ideas on how I could develop my own work. I also attended some FAO symposium lectures that discussed farm animals as genetic resources, how they should be managed and implications and opportunities that exist world-wide for the improvement of livestock.

In addition to the theatre presentations, there were two poster sessions. During one, I presented my work entitled 'Characterisation of Bone Growth in two lines of Suffolk Sheep' (S. E. Morrow, B. H. Thorp, J. C. Fraser and R. M. Lewis). I feel that this was the best platform to present my work. I was able speak informally to many delegates on subjects ranging from the Callipyge gene (a gene that causes extra muscling in sheep), transgenic sheep that produced excess growth hormone, the effects of selection on bone development in mice, and foetal foal bone development.

As a relief from sitting in numerous lecture theatres, a Production Genetics Field Day was organised for Wednesday afternoon, providing an opportunity for farmers and delegates to talk and share ideas. In addition, there were sheep shearing exhibitions, a working sheep dog display and local craft stalls. The highlight of the evening was a 'Wool Spectacular Fashion Parade'. I was also able to attend a night time bush walk to spotlight some native animals, including wallabies, possums, spiders and owls.

In addition to the congress, I was able to arrange a visit to the UNE cat scanning (CT) facility. This is of particular interest to me as my main project concerns the body composition of sheep as determined by X-ray Computed Tomography. I found this visit incredibly useful. Not only was I able to find out the type of work that is of importance in Australia, but I also learned of websites that contain relevant literature on experiments using CT scanning and some software that may be useful in the analyses of my scans.

To conclude, my attendance at 6wcgalp was of enormous benefit to me. I enjoyed the opportunity to present my work, meet many new people and to get a glimpse of what goes on in the world of animal breeding. I would like to thank the James Rennie Bequest for providing me with a grant in order that I could attend.