Integrated management systems for livestock

British Society of Animal Science
Occasional Publication No 28

INSTITUTION OF **AGRICULTURAL ENGINEERS**

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Proceedings of a joint meeting organised by
THE BRITISH SOCIETY OF ANIMAL SCIENCE
and the INSTITUTION OF AGRICULTURAL ENGINEERS
held at Selwyn College, Cambridge, UK, September 2001

BSAS Occasional Publication

Number 28

edited by C M Wathes, A R Frost, F Gordon and J D Wood

BSAS
Edinburgh
2001

Foreword

Sustainable Livestock Production requires that tight product specifications are met profitably while environmental impact is minimised and welfare promoted. These requirements may conflict and the inevitable compromises merely release the immediate pressure while avoiding a long term solution. Other industries have successfully resolved similar tensions by the application of process control techniques. This conference focussed on this approach, termed integrated management systems (IMS) for livestock.

Integration takes several forms in IMS. First, the development of IMS couples the biological understanding of the animal scientist with the technology of the agricultural engineer: the conference was held under the aegis of the British Society of Animal Science and the Institution of Agricultural Engineers with generous sponsorship from Tesco PLC, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and the Meat and Livestock Commission. Secondly, control of livestock production involves consideration of biological, chemical and physical processes over various time-scales. Finally, the practical application of IMS on the livestock farm needs close co-operation between the potential manufacturer of the control systems, the research engineers and scientists and the farmers, all of whom have an important, vital role to play.

The conference coincided with a period of active debate between the newly elected UK Government and other stakeholders about the future of livestock production; BSE, Foot and Mouth disease, the welfare of intensively farmed animals, climate change, environmental pollution and other concerns were foremost in the delegates' minds. While the conference's timing was fortuitous to some extent, integrated management systems may prove to be one means to cope with the complexities of livestock production in the 21st Century.

The final session considered research needs and commercial opportunities for IMS – a brief report on the breakout and summary sessions is available from the convenor.

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September 2001

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1463981500040917 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The papers in this occasional publication have not been refereed. The Society and ISAE can accept no responsibility for their accuracy. Views expressed in all contributions are those of the authors and not those of the British Society of Animal Science or the Institution of Agricultural Engineers.

The following organisations pledged generous support for the meeting Integrated management systems for livestock for which the organizers are extremely grateful:

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