

**NUFFIELD FARMING SCHOLARSHIPS TRUST**

**2003 SCHOLARSHIP REPORT**

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**THE STUDY**

‘The Role of Discussion Groups. Their assistance in the development of successful agriculture with particular reference to the dairy industry.’

# The Dartington Cattle Breeding Trust Award

## Disclaimer

‘The report is the result of my studies and reflects my findings and opinions, but these are not necessarily those of the Nuffield Farming Scholarship Trust or of my sponsor’.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### ***Personal Background***

I farm in partnership with my brother Arthur, who farms the home farm Bodysgaw. Twenty-one years ago, prior to the introduction of milk quotas, we got the tenancy of Croenllwm, where I now farm. Both farms are linked by additional rented land. We own a further 120 acres some distance away from the main holding, which is used as a runoff. Historically, we have been what you might call a traditional mixed livestock farm, with dairying, beef and sheep; however, as of next year we will solely be dairy farmers.

### ***Topic Background***

Apart from one year's agricultural training at Llysfasi Agricultural College, my own knowledge and experience has mainly been supplemented by various farm consultants, one-off farm open days, evening meetings, farming press articles and milk levy funded research. These have been the staple diet of British agriculture for decades; however, will these be sufficient methods for future agricultural sustainability?

During the mid 80s, I came across 'farm walks', which at the time, I thought was an unique way of getting farmers to interact and see first hand what other farmers were doing. These were government funded and run locally and appealed to the younger farmer. Unfortunately, when the service became fee paying many farmers no longer made use of the service.

The mid 80s through to the early 90s brought a period of prosperity to the dairy industry; it could be said that farmers, myself included, became complacent and cost of production was not questioned! The introduction of milk quotas in 1984 and other EU directives certainly made you think more about production, but not necessarily of the financial effect it had on a farm business. The de-regulation of the MMB in 1994 saw a further boom in dairying, however, in the spring of 1996 BSE really set in, immediately affecting the barren cow and calf trade. The following year also saw the milk price begin to fall and this has continued ever since.

In the early 80s, I became involved with the British Grassland Society, my father having previously been involved during the 70s. At the time, the BGS was a modern society to be a member of; it was an opportunity to share information and experiences with other like minded individuals. In Wales the BGS ran various silage and grass competitions and depending on the open-mindedness of the judges, individual farmers could progress from local to regional to national level. This enabled farmers to benchmark against the best in the industry. Subsequently, through the BGS in the mid/late 1990s, I became involved in discussion groups.

At this time Jerry Rider brought consultant John Simmonds to our shore. He stayed for five months and during this time, I went to three of his meetings. Locally, ADAS assisted, recruiting 'like minded' farmers who were interested in grazing systems with the aim of improved profitability. In 1999, full time consultants were employed with funding from the BGS and MDC and '*Pasture to Profit*' was born. Since then I have become a regular participant at our local discussion group – 'The Grazing Gogs'. I have witnessed the benefits, both financial and personal, that membership of a discussion group can bring to a farming business regardless of the system operated.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- Dairy farmers who participate in any form of discussion group are progressive.
- Group involvement is not biased – all members of the farming business are encouraged to participate, staff, wives, etc.
- Discussion groups are an established process for information gathering, implementation and evaluation.
- Australia, New Zealand and Ireland have bodies that successfully fund extension services that tie in with research organisations.
- Overseas regulatory bodies have identified the economic and social benefits of extension services.
- Further development of farmer focus groups in the UK is needed. Interaction of education, research and training bodies is needed to avoid unnecessary duplication and to reduce costs.
- More farmers need to be made aware of the concept, through emphasising the personal and financial benefits that discussion group involvement can bring.
- Research, development and extension activities are aimed at giving dairy farmers opportunities to improve productivity, profitability and sustainability.
- A key priority for extension activities is the rapid adoption of new research and development material.

## **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The purpose of my study was to define the role of discussion groups and to understand how the mechanisms of farmer focus groups assist in the development of successful dairying. My aims were to meet discussion group members and facilitators and to participate in focus meetings, that in turn would highlight the different methods and styles of running groups and to identify the benefits derived from such activities. Additional research was also done into the origin of discussion groups and how the concept has evolved. Through meeting with participants and hearing their comments and observations, I was able to quantify the achievements of discussion groups in terms of their assistance in the development of successful dairying.

## **METHODOLOGY**

I interviewed farmers, consultants, farm advisors and researchers; visited extension service providers and dairy units that varied in cow numbers from 50 to 1200; collected specific field data and trawled through numerous periodicals and spent endless hours on the internet! These various knowledge fonts provided me with clear facts and figures that have enabled me to complete my study. In New Zealand and Australia, discussion groups are an established form of information gathering and dissemination with a long history of proven grass based research and education. However, Irish groups differ to those in the southern hemisphere as they started comparatively recently but are extremely progressive. In the true spirit of 'Discussion Groups', not only was I satisfying my own research requirements but had a list of questions from the 'Grazing Gogs'!

For me to fully appreciate the concept of discussion groups on my overseas study I replicated my research in the UK and this provided a benchmark for my overseas findings.

## **BRIEF OVERVIEW OF OVERSEAS STUDY**

### *Australia*

Having left home with niggling doubts regarding my own farm business, nothing too serious, just quota concerns, arriving in Melbourne, certainly put things into perspective. Having chosen to concentrate my study in Victoria, due to its dairying profile, I found an industry suffering the after effects of its worst drought in nearly 100 years. This fact was highlighted in nearly every farmer meeting/conversation that I had during my stay. I participated in various on-farm discussion, some were run by Department of Primary Industry (DPI) extension officers, others were dairy company operated. Conversation topics varied from calf rearing to staff issues, but the predominate topic was drought orientated. What surprised me in Victoria was the age profile of the farmer groups, many groups were split – young 20 to 40 years of age, with no previous group experience, whilst the remaining members were 40+yrs, who had experienced the group concept in the early 80s during a relatively problem free era and were consequently less dependant on the structural benefits provided by discussion groups. However, the need

for drought management advice and the support of fellow farmers had made them return to a discussion group environment. In addition to farmer participation, professional representatives were also present; they included a feed and fertilizer company and a local bank. I also had the pleasure of attending a newly formed group – it was refreshing to see the involvement of young farmers – even though they lacked knowledge and confidence, the DPI extension officer made sure that the discussion involved everyone. Seeing this group made me think of my own earlier experiences some five years ago – “Been there” and here I was studying discussion groups for my Nuffield study.

### *New Zealand*

Having spent November in Victoria, I took a relatively short flight to Auckland. Throughout December I toured New Zealand, again visiting farms, participating in farmer discussion groups; however, for two weeks I would have the company of my family. The group environment was very similar to Australia, which I had expected to a certain degree as the concept is a well practised and a proven information tool. Due to the nature of the farming system in New Zealand, where progression involves regular movement on ‘Gypsy Day’ when farmers and herds move, involvement in discussion groups can aid transission and provide new members with local knowledge of new areas. Again, when moving to new areas, the networking benefits of a group can provide a farmer with contact for the forthcoming season and subsequent years. Their progressive farming methods extend to their attitudes; all staff members are encouraged to participate in discussion group activities.

### *Ireland*

I eventually visited Ireland during the autumn. I visited dairy farms and attended meetings; what amazed me was again the young age of the group members, not just one or two, but the whole group. Their knowledge base was exceptional and their openness with their financial details, farm facts and details was refreshing. They openly challenged each others ideas in their typical Irish approach – there was no holding back with suggestions and ideas – lively and heated debate but most enjoyable. They even had to discuss and debate the quickest route for me to catch the ferry!

## FINDINGS

### *The Role of Discussion Groups*

By defining the phrase ‘Discussion Group’ and explaining its origin we can then identify its role.

*Discussion* - Examination by argument/debate  
Investigate/challenge/question/study/comment

*Group* - A number of persons together  
Bringing together

In the context of my study the ‘group’ is a collection of individuals who are mainly dairy farmers and agricultural professionals who have decided to join forces with the intention of discussion. This can involve any aspect/area of their business.

The term ‘discussion group’ is widely used, however ‘focus’ and ‘extension’ are terms more in keeping with the present.

In Victoria, ‘discussion groups’ have been used as an effective and successful business tool since 1965, when Jack Green, ‘Mr Discussion Group’, brought the idea back from New Zealand. Initially, these groups were seen as a means of sharing ideas, mainly on parlour design and as a support mechanism during tough times of drought, bush fires and such like. As farming progressed, farmer needs changed; deregulation in the mid 80s necessitated that businesses became more financially orientated, subsequently, extension services adapted accordingly.

Australian dairy farmers now operate in a completely deregulated industry environment, where international prices are the major factor in determining the price received by farmers for their milk; by world standards Australian dairy farmers receive a low price and hence have to run very efficient production systems. Victoria state producers are no exception to this, with a temperate climate, good soils and a normally reliable supply of water through high rainfall and well established irrigation systems provide a year round pastoral system. However, my visit to Victoria coincided with its 1 in 100 year drought and its effect was visible and farmers I spoke to, were suffering financially – hay in November 2002 was \$70/bale by March 2003 it had risen to \$220/bale. Permanent Water Rights had risen from \$700/mgltr in 1996 to \$1200/mgltr in 2003.

Victoria produces 63% of Australian milk; hence the state dominates the dairy industry. The dairy industry in Victoria focuses heavily on the production of milk for manufacturing purposes and as a state contributes 85% of Australian dairy exports. They are able to compete internationally because of their low cost pasture based systems. Consequently, Victorian dairy farmers are strongly supported, through Dairy Australia and Australian government funds. Currently, Dairy Australia, through monthly levies from producers (approx. 0.317c/ltr) invests \$35 million a year of dairy farmer levy

payments along with \$15 million a year from Government funds in projects for the benefit of the farmers, the dairy industry and the community.

Through such funding Victorian dairy producers have adopted new or improved technology that has enabled them to increase milk production by 5% over the past decade; nationally this has helped gain Australia an overall world trade share of 15 %, making them the world's third biggest dairy exporter. Although the number of dairy farms has halved over the last twenty years to 10,000 in 2003, herd size over this period had increased from 85 to 210 cows in 2003.

With the Victorian dairy industry being such a large contributor to the Australian export market; it is obvious that the industry underpins many regional communities in many parts of the state. Consequently, it became apparent that the provision of research and development services would have to be updated so that dairy producers would be able to maintain and improve their long term profitability and retain their competitive levels of productivity and sustainability. With this in mind, the Department of Primary Industry (DPI) collaborated with industry, farmers and local communities to develop and implement sustainable production systems which are critical for the long term viability of agricultural industries.

Various bodies run Australian discussion groups, *Target 10* is one such body; it is an industry driven state wide dairy industry development project catering to the needs of dairy farmers in Victoria. It is part government (DPI) /industry (Dairy Australia) funded and since its introduction in 1992 has gained widespread support from dairy farmers. Since its conception in 1992, more than 43,000 attendances have been recorded on management programmes and activities, in other words over 40% of Victorian farms have benefited.

Their brief is to work with groups and provide a technical and financial information programme that benefits the farmer. As the service is continually appraised, emphasis is placed on specific focus topics within groups; courses and workshops are provided leading eventually to a qualification. Both Federal and State governments encourage training that leads to a qualification as it improves industry efficiency; farmers are better equipped to run their businesses and are more adaptable during tough times – also bank lending is more favourable to farmers who participate in this learning process.

*Target 10* Programs cover the following areas:

- Grazing
- Soils and Fertilizer
- Cow Nutrition
- Dairy Farm Performance Analysis
- Natural Resource Management
- Employing Made Easier
- Business Planning





The programmes are designed for all dairy farmers, managers, partners, husbands, wives, share-farmers, owners and employees who wish to improve their farm business. Although the DPI manages the project and provides *Target 10* with extension and research staff, financial resources and project administration, other organisations also provide services that enable *T10* to fully function. The University of Melbourne provide lectures, education facilitators and course accreditation through its major regional campuses; dairy processors, such as Parmalat, Murray Goulburn and Nestle, to name a few, provide *T10* with factory, field and advisory staff and assistance with the distribution of information. The dairy companies also run some groups, however, less emphasis is placed on training and qualification and more is placed on the creamery's requirements, farm assurance, etc.

On farm discussion groups encourage participation from professionals (accountants, bankers, and vets), advisors (fertilizer, feed), product suppliers and milk buyers. This stimulates interaction and encourages information flow; this external participation is geared towards the farming season.

In their capacity as regional development boards for the three main dairying regions, WestVic Dairy, Gipps Dairy and Murray Dairy also assist with the promotion and running of discussion groups in Victoria. They are incorporated bodies whose board of directors represent dairy farmers, dairy companies, research, education and service providers. These regional development boards co-operate with the DPI, Dairy Australia and the Department of Natural Resources and Environment and other bodies to develop research and development programmes and to facilitate wider use of existing technology and human resource developments.

Funding bodies in Australia demand information, consequently, discussion groups have become very structured. This culture equates to hundreds of ongoing projects, from participating groups and monitor farms through to universities that are involved in certain aspects of the research engine, be it planning, evaluation or feedback, the completed research information is then used and disseminated in farmer conferences and publications and more often than not is eventually replicated by other farmers. During the 80s, less than 5% of dairy farmers were involved in this process; today over 33% belong or are influenced by discussion groups.

Although discussion groups are mainly associated with on-farm meetings, with the advent of *e-mail*, it has become possible to join global discussion groups. Their aim remains the same – information gathering, from financial to technical information. *Fencepost*, *Grazers Edge*, *Women in Dairying*, *Womens Agriculture Network*, *Target 10-online*, *VicDairy-L*, *Graze-L* are all examples of such sites. Access to such sites only requires internet access – log in with a user name and password; for little effort the reward is great. Web groups allow the user to log-on at a time that suits and involvement is unlimited.



Provides information on all aspects of agriculture in New Zealand; from information on the weather in a specific area to employment opportunities. Its on-line discussion group is a public forum where site members can share views on farming related subjects and issues; the on-line discussion is even categorized into convenient topics:

- Dairy Herd Management
- Dairy Farm Management
- General Dairy
- Livestock
- Rural Voice
- Public

Both the women in dairying and women's agriculture network sites have formed to provide women in the agricultural industry with a forum; women are well known for their multi-tasking capabilities – which is a must if married to a farmer, so my wife tells me! These sites allow women access to information and an opportunity to share experiences with others from similar environments. *Women in Dairying* is an e-mail network that was formed in 1998 with seven members; its aim was to provide a forum to share information, ideas and experiences related specifically to the dairy industry. There are now nearly 400 members and the network now runs successful conferences, and this has resulted in the group sourcing additional funding and sponsorship to

*'Promote and increased awareness of women's participation in the dairying industry'.*

The group, through funding has employed a facilitator to achieve their objectives; their aim is to establish Regional Groups that meet in numerous centres throughout New Zealand to discuss relevant dairying matters.

*Women's Agriculture Network* differs in that it was only formed in January 2004 with 4 members and was aimed at women in general. Its objective was to provide a forum so that women can

- exchange practical and technical farm and business ideas
- ask questions and offer solutions
- provide information and contacts

Target 10 online  
information that works  
dairyextension



*Provides information on extension services at the press of a key*

*Target 10* Community provides information on the availability of discussion groups according to area and the topics discussed along with a list of extension officers, listing their area of expertise. Current course listings and programmes are also obtainable.

*Target 10* Resources offers dairy related information regarding farm extension manuals and online consultants. The manuals and tools cover areas such as:

- Grazing
- Feeding Dairy Cows
- Managing Dairy Costs

*Target 10* On-Line Consultant cover areas such as:

- Pasture Management
- Dairy Business
- Managing Dairy Effluent

*The Full Bottle* is a T10 On-line monthly newsletter, that includes articles from the Regional newsletters. It also contains information on the latest research findings. Once logged on T10, you then have a choice of 'weblets' to visit:



A guide to managing waterlogged paddocks in winter

Dairy Discussion Groups



This is partly funded by GippsDairy and the NRE to support DG's and to enhance links between research and the dairy industry



Body Condition Scoring

*VicDairy-L* is an e-mail list for the discussion of dairy farming in south eastern Australia. There are currently 450 subscribers to the site, comprising 75% dairy farmers and 25% dairy industry service providers. Discussion covers a wide range of dairying issues.

Discussion groups have been operational in New Zealand for over half a century. They were started with the aim of assisting returning servicemen and new entrant farmers after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War with information transfer. They covered new concepts such as rotational grazing, electric fencing and AI. Over the years, various bodies have offered farmers the opportunity to meet and learn:

- Industry Herd Improvement Scheme
- New Zealand Dairy Board
- Livestock Improvement Consulting Officer Scheme
- Dexcel

Over time, farmer requirements have changed, in addition to pasture management and shed design, improving dairy profitability is now a main objective. Subsequently, service providers have changed and have adopted and implemented learning processes that fulfil the objectives of both the dairy farmers and the dairy industry. The success of the New Zealand dairy industry has been based on sustained growth, achieved through adoption of better management practices, structural adjustment and export competitiveness.

Dairy farming is part of a long and proud agricultural tradition in New Zealand. Dairy cattle were first imported in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century by European settlers to provide milk, butter and cheese for their local communities. It did not take long before milk products were being exported; in 1882 New Zealand exported its first refrigerated shipment of meat and butter from Port Chalmers, Dunedin to London. Through refrigerated shipping New Zealand developed a substantial dairy export trade, especially with Britain and with its favourable weather and highly innovative and efficient dairy industry. It currently exports around 95% of its dairy produce.

The findings of an independent report in 1997 highlighted that for the New Zealand dairy industry to retain its competitive advantage, it had to achieve an annual increase of productivity of four percent and major changes were proposed.

In 1998 the dairy industry was re-structured, with the amalgamation of the New Zealand dairy board and two of the largest dairy co-operatives, one commercial body was formed – Fonterra. Following de-regulation, dairy industry leaders recognised that an independent organisation was needed to oversee and fund the activities required to benefit the whole industry and a ‘service provider’ would also be needed to cover research and extension services

In 2001 both Dairy In-Sight and Dexcel were formed, both would operate separate remits. Dairy In-Sight would be responsible for co-ordinating and funding ‘Industry Good Activities’ on behalf of its members - all dairy farm owners and sharemilkers. Its mission would be ‘to secure and enhance dairy farming in New Zealand’; whilst Dexcel in its capacity as ‘provider’ would cover areas of research and development, extension services and education. Its responsibility would be ‘*To promote, develop and implement*

*initiatives related to improving dairy farm productivity in New Zealand and other activities for the benefit of dairy farmers’.*

Priorities for ‘industry good activities’ were developed in consultation with dairy farmers, current service providers and other groups. Funding would be generated from milk suppliers in the form of a levy based on per kg/milk solids basis, (3.4cents/kgMS). Currently, approximately one cent of this levy is used to support Dexcel programmes and research.



The Consulting Officer Service had previously focussed on shared farmer learning through extension groups and tended to concentrate on farmer subjects of “cows and grass”, which at the time was relevant.

<b>SEASON</b>	<b>HERD NO'S</b>	<b>COW TOTALS</b>	<b>AV. HERD SIZE</b>
1993/94	14597	2,736,452	188
2003/04	12751	3,851,302	302

Dairy Statistics 03/04

Over the last decade farm size, herd size and production have altered accordingly; subsequently, farmer involvement and support of their traditional geographic discussion group started to decline. As farm businesses were changing and although cows and grass was the core of their business, through open consultation, farmers identified and informed Dexcel that they required assistance in four main areas:

- human resources
- farm production systems
- environment/animal welfare
- business planning

Through the integration of research, development, extension and education, Dexcel had identified that the dairy industry was changing; subsequently its provision of extension services would have to change. Through areas identified by farmers, Dexcel Extension and Dexcel Research have integrated their work into four programmes:



Research in the area of people and technology has resulted in this extension programme, which is about delivering improved employer professionalism and improved labour productivity.



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Research in milk production and products is aligned to this extension programme, that focuses on delivering healthy well fed and fertile cows within sustainable farm systems.



The integration of future farm systems aligns to this extension programme that aims to deliver improved use of planning and business practice.

For nearly sixty years discussion groups have played a major part in New Zealand dairying with more than 60% of farmers attending a group, with many businesses bringing along at least one staff member. Dexcel have realized that discussion groups are the mainstay of communication with farmers, however, they have identified that farmer needs have changed, subsequently; they are developing and implementing programmes that will benefit their dairy farmers and the industry as a whole. Information will also be transferred through specific focus groups and specialist events, where farmers can gain specialist knowledge in an area. These groups and events will contain “like minded people” who want to gain more results from attending the group or event.

Dairy farming is becoming technically complex so specialist groups and events will offer the opportunity to investigate a topic in detail rather than a broad topic overview. These groups and events will attract farmers who want to make more rapid progress in a specific area and will draw members from further a field. Geographic discussion groups will continue, however, participants will be encouraged to set objectives and operate at a more formal level to ensure value to participants.

Currently, there are about 400 dairy orientated discussion groups in Ireland, the majority, around 260, are operated by *Teagasc* and the remainder are run by either the dairy companies/agribusiness or are ‘self run’ by farmers. *Teagasc* provides integrated research, advisory and training services for Irish agriculture and its food industry. They are a semi-state organization established under Irish government legislation, subsequently 75% of their budget comes from Irish government and EU funding, with the balance generated from earned income. Sixty percent of this budget is used on advisory and training whilst the remaining 40% is spent on research.

*Teagasc* have identified that improved profitability is achieved through better farm management and that the most effective way of transferring information and advice is through farm visits, short courses and discussion groups. With less financial resources, *Teagasc* realized that the group environment is an efficient time management tool with regard to both the farmer and the advisor's time, subsequently as an organization are keen to promote the 'discussion group' concept.

Visiting Victoria in Australia, New Zealand and Ireland enabled me to see how each country has made use of the 'discussion group' concept. Dairy farmers have embraced the concept and each country has developed it to suit their own specific needs, however the universal aim remains unchanged – 'getting like minded farmers together'; through communicating with other farmers about their experiences, farmers inadvertently develop improved business acumen and create a personal knowledge base. This is maintained and developed through continued discussion and problem solving, further enhanced by feedback from their fellow members.

Local or regional (depending on the continent) discussion groups are gatherings of local farmers led by a facilitator who may be a Department of Agriculture advisor or private consultant. Groups meet on a regular basis, normally every month on each other's farms, to exchange and share information. They enable the agricultural sector to gain invaluable information through collective access to specialists, professionals, consultants and other like-minded individuals in a group atmosphere.

## CONCLUSIONS

### **The role of discussion groups:**

- Provide an environment that enhances farmer learning and which encourages members to reflect on new and existing practices
- Provide access to specialists, professionals and consultants and encourages group progression and personal development
- Aid the development of an effective production system in terms of profitability and sustainability that encourages good management practices
- Identify and address personal/business goals, farm business and opportunities
- Provide a good forum for problem sharing and solving
- Provides a means of networking and aids the formation of new friendships by giving an opportunity to mix with other like minded individuals
- Members are responsive to change; happy in their work and supportive of each other
- Creates a team approach, individuals come together with the aim of working together, not to compete against each other

### **Discussion groups assist in the development of successful dairying through:**

- Improved awareness of external factors
- Changing with the times
- Adapting to the needs of farmers
- Adopting new methods
- Implementing new research
- Identifying market demands
- Have become an important forum for farmers during difficult times: periods of change in the industry increase farmer involvement and dependency
- Encourage better business practices in terms of
  - ~ Financial planning and monitoring
  - ~ Human resources
  - ~ Technical systems



## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **In relation to the UK**

- Make discussion groups more focused; concentrate on individual topics.
- Topics should be heavily geared towards improving profitability.
- Should be made up of members with similar farming systems, so that topics discussed are relevant to the system and are appropriate to the season.
- Increased involvement of specialists and professionals to include vets, accountants, agronomists, agricultural colleges, fertilizer and feed companies.
- Provide training for all staff members through workshops, seminars and short courses that tie in with discussion groups topics.
- Involve all farm staff in discussion groups, so that everybody is kept motivated.
- Research every aspect of each individual topic, until participants become experts in their own right.
- Levy bodies should be more accountable to their contributors and should provide information that is actually relevant to the successful production of milk.
- Greater co-operation and consultation between farmers, milk buyers, processors and regulatory bodies.
- Levy bodies replicate proven systems with regard to R & D, extension services and education; this would avoid unnecessary wastage of both time and money.
- Levy bodies in conjunction with farmers and industry professionals create an industry manual that would cover such aspects as herd fertility, soil management and other relevant topics.

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To my family. Without their support and understanding, my study tour would not have been possible. To staff and friends who looked after the farm in my absence – Diolch yn Fawr.

Extended thanks go to the farmers who let me visit their farms, question their farming practices and for the generous hospitality that I received during my travels. Not forgetting the various government staff and extension officers that I met.

Special thanks go to ‘Pasture to Profit’, especially Jerry Rider, as without his foresight I would not have been aware of the ‘discussion group’ concept. For those of us who have embraced the theory, we are better people and most definitely better farmers. It is for this reason, I hope that others will follow.