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HOW TO RUN A FIELD DAY

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Branches of Federated Farmers do an excellent job by running field days in their districts. This article offers some suggestions on how to organize a field day to those who have undertaken the responsibility of being a chairman or a secretary of the local branch. I assume you have very limited resources to work with unlike the Ruakura Animal Research Station which has 5,000 visitors at its annual field day. A fleet of buses moves farmers from point to point where they inspect the wide range of interesting and practical experiments. This article discusses field days for 20 or 30 people held on local farms. These small field days have an extremely important part to play in New Zealand's farm development. The information farmers receive from local practical experience may not be so clear cut as the information from a research farm but it is close to home. A practice which is successful over the fence may be a better guide than a practice accurately established at a research centre 300 miles away. Besides visitors are often more impressed with achievements of local farmers than they are with research results that have the "Treasury" behind them.

Field days help New Zealand's Agricultural development in two ways. Firstly, whether we like it or not, we all like to keep up with the Joneses. Now there are some who are completely satisfied with the way in which they run their farms. This illusion is preserved so long as they do not compare their performance with the performance of others. At a field day they may find that they are being left behind. Secondly, a well organized field day should provide visitors with information on how to farm better.

Preparation before a field day is all important. It is a good idea to form a small subcommittee which includes representatives of other organizations such as Y.F.C. and your local Farm Advisory Officer of the Department of Agriculture and start planning at least nine months ahead.

Your first job is to decide on a message. If the organizing committee fail to work out a message, there is a fair chance that the field day will be a failure. The committee should ask themselves, "What information do we want to communicate" and then search for the best way of putting this information across. If they can not think of a suitable message they are wasting their time and everyone else's time by holding a field day.

The local farm advisory officer will be in a good position to help. He will have built up a philosophy of how best to tackle the farming problems of your district. Among his clients there will be some who will be prepared to show visitors round their farms and tell of their experiences. These "innovating farmers" are doing a wonderful job for the community. If one of these innovating farmers will co-operate, the message of "How to increase production and profit in this district" is easy to put across.

Sometimes the message for the field day concerns some specialized aspect of farming rather than farm development. It may be a topic which is causing a deal of interest at the time—bulk harvesting and storage of grain, methods of making silage, design of woolsheds or milking sheds, farm woodlots, drainage, weed control, etc. Field days on these topics often lead to tours around points of interest on several farms rather than a visit to one farm only. For instance farmers may visit four

new herringbone sheds to get up-to-the minute ideas on design.

Your committee should next decide when to hold the day. The winter is too cold; farmers are too busy at lambing and at harvest. Consequently the early and late summer and early autumn are good times. Check that the date does not clash with other events. Further, time the field day to suit the topic. If you are going to hold a field day on fencing then the autumn is the obvious time because this is the time that farmers are thinking about it.

Thanks to the co-operation of the Press and Radio, publicity is not much of a problem. A notice to all members is a help but probably the most effective method is to get six or seven key members to ring up their neighbours and remind them that the day is on.

Let us assume the committee have decided to hold a field day on a property where the owner has made some rapid improvements in output over recent years. The owner has kindly agreed to co-operate and the message is "How to increase production and profit in the district". How should the programme go?

Get the field day away to a good start with a description of the farm plus a description of the technical changes which have been made in recent years together with the results in terms of extra output produced. The owner of the farm—your host—is the best man to do this. He will need a map of the farm pinned up in the woolshed. Make out a chart on a large piece of paper giving the vital statistics on the changes in land use, stock numbers, stock performance and crop output. A blackboard will do, but these days felt pens can be bought cheaply which are ideal for drawing on paper. Do not confuse the audience with unnecessary details and make the letters at least one inch high.

Now that the audience is orientated, the party can set off round the farm. The organizers should arrange for a series of stopping places where the visitors can see how the changes were made and how they worked out. At each stopping place arrange for a speaker to lead the discussion. The speaker may be a visiting expert, the local farm advisory officer or the owner. For instance if the owner has been breaking in claydowns country, the first stopping place might be a paddock

in the process of being ploughed out of tussock. All the equipment he uses for the job could be on display and the owner could give a blow by blow description of his methods. The farm safety officer might follow this up with a short talk on how to avoid accidents in working up this class of country. The next stopping point might be new paddock where the farm advisory officer might speak on pasture establishment and fertilizer rates on this soil type. If there has been time for preparation he may have laid down a plot trial to back up his recommendations. A model programme is set out at the end of this bulletin.

Choose these stopping places carefully. Sheltered spots out of the wind make it easier for everyone to hear. Face the speaker into the sun.

The sun makes a natural foot-light and also the listeners do not develop a headache from the glare. Transport is no real problem with small field days. Tractors and trailers with bales for seats are a good system though often car transport is the easiest way.

And so from stopping place to stopping place the story of how the owner achieved his increase in production unfolds in a logical sequence with evidence to back it up. At last the visitors return to the homestead. This is the moment to answer that important question — did these changes pay?

Now this is a tricky question for two reasons. Firstly, a training in farm management and economics is needed to analyse the financial records, and secondly, many farmers are unwilling to disclose their financial position. Fortunately there is a way of working out the financial income without the owner disclosing how much money he is making. All the economist has to do is to determine the extra profit made from the improvement programme. He simply says, "This farmer is making £1,000 a year more now that he is following this improved programme" — or whatever the figure happens to be. He may add, "At this rate of profit the capital he has invested will be paid back in about four years."

Obviously visitors want to know whether or not it is going to pay them to follow the same development procedure. If it is a very profitable scheme then it may be worthwhile borrowing at least part of the money. For instance, in Taranaki, Mr John Graham from Massey University has

Stopping Place	"Sub" Message	Speaker or Discussion Leader
Woolshed	Changes that have been made on the farm in the last three years.	Owner
Paddock ploughed out of tussock	How we cultivated this steep land. "Avoid death on the hills."	Owner Farm Safety Officer
Paddock in swedes	How to grow good crops of swedes or turnips in this country.	Farm Advisory Officer
New grass paddock (with experimental plots)	"Use plenty of lime and super so that you make a proper job of land development. Done properly it will not revert."	Farm Advisory Officer
Aerial Topdressed sidling	"Sowing molybdate super and seed at liberal rates is a cheap way of pasture improvement but you must follow it up."	Farm Advisory Officer Owner
Gorse patch (small demonstration of control)	"It is no use spraying gorse unless you replace the gorse with grass."	Technical Officer of Chemical firm
New Fence	"Cultivable areas must be fenced from uncultivable areas." "Electric fences have advantages and disadvantages." "Under some circumstances you can get a subsidy from the Catchment Board for fencing."	Owner Farm Advisory Officer Catchment Board Officer
Green feed block by New Hay Shed	"Winter feed organization is most important."	Owner and Farm Advisory Officer
Hogget block (a group of selenium treated and a group of untreated hoggets are penned up for inspection)	"Selenium gives responses on most farms in this district."	Club Veterinarian
Paddock with ewes in it	"Heavy stocking and relatively low sheep performance is an essential part of land development."	Owner and Farm Advisory Officer
Woolshed	"This land development plan is returning an extra £2000 per year. This represents a 20% tax free return on the money invested." "Marginal lands will help those who cannot borrow capital for development elsewhere."	Economic Specialist Field Officer of the Lands and Survey Department
	Vote of thanks endorsing main views of speakers.	Chairman of Branch

studied the financial records of farmers who have followed a programme energetically propounded by advisory officers in that district, of putting on one ton of extra fertilizer for every extra cow added to the milking herd. When labour has become a problem these dairy farmers have built herringbone sheds. Mr Graham

found that farmers who followed this programme made a 20% tax free return on the extra capital they invested. Mr A. G. Barwell, of the Department of Agriculture, Christchurch, has made a similar analysis of a demonstration farm on Banks Peninsula.

Most of us have a great deal of

difficulty looking at a whole mass of figures. Strip-tease charts are an excellent way of exposing the essential data bit by bit. You put up your figures on a chart and cover them up with slips of paper. Stick these slips over the figures with a small blob of glue in each corner. Then as the speaker talks about his data he pulls off the slips of paper. This method creates interest and focuses the audiences' attention on the figures the speaker is talking about.

Always invite newspaper reporters along to your field days. We are most fortunate in New Zealand in that so much farming news finds its way into the newspapers. Reporters will make sure that the information presented at the field day will be available for those who did not get along.

Finally, small field days are not very difficult to organize as long as you remember two points. Find a message which will help farmers in your district and plan well ahead. If you do these two things then a little effort can be of great help to your community.

A Model Programme

This programme is for the committee's guidance. It sets out the stopping places, the message at each stopping place and the speaker. It is **not** the programme which will be sent out to the audience. The staff at Lincoln College are always ready to help you with a field day.

Overall Message: "How to increase production and profit on claydown farms in this district."

Copies of this Bulletin may be obtained from the Secretary, Canterbury Chamber of Commerce, P.O. Box 187, Christchurch.