PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS TO THE 21ST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE TROPICAL GRASSLAND SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA—1983

INFORMATION AND THE SOCIETY

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"The Society was founded on the belief that a need existed for improving communication (information and data interchange) between primary producers, advisory services, service industries and scientists for mutual benefit" (Evans 1982). Accepting this, the decline in primary producer membership should be a matter of concern for the Society. This decline results, not only in their loss of access to data, but more importantly, in their vital contribution to tropical pasture information being reduced. Do primary producers recognise or value the role that the Society plays in the information/communication area?

Attendance at field days indicate that primary producers can be attracted and they are interested in new data and information. The Society's practices, presidential nominations and field day organisations are aimed to achieve data transfer. The basic question is, does the Society do enough? Will involvement in other areas attract primary producers?

Information has been defined as *transformed* data and accessible knowledge which has meaning for a current *decision* process. Data is raw unevaluated messages which has the potential to become information through a transformation process. Information is *user* and *time* specific. As scientists or educators we need to recognise this and attempt to develop strategies to account for the situation. Further, we cannot assume that the more data we collect the more information is provided.

As the Society is involved in this information transfer it must recognise that the primary producer operates a system. It is within this system that decisions are made and that profit is a major goal. The system also varies in complexity dependent on soils, weather and type of enterprise. The primary producer has inputs, of which data is a part, which need to be transformed to give an output. The need is to evaluate the new data, transform it to knowledge, in relation to the system. It is necessary to recognise that new data is restricted as to its collection base and may be regarded as irrelevant in another situation. Traditionally this need has been the area for extension activities. Should and can the Society become more involved in this area? The Society through its Journal and field days may consider that this is the limit of its resources.

However, recent advances in technology have provided new tools for the decision making process. The 1982 Annual General Meeting demonstrated some of this and what a success this display of computer technology was. The Society should be prepared to explore all avenues in this transformation process as an avenue to aiding its primary producer members.

I am sure that primary producers do see their farm as a system and that they wish to improve its output. Do scientists of the Society think in the same way? Of necessity, scientists appear to become specialists in only a part of the farming system. Sure it is fashionable to adhere to a systems outlook. However, the scientist is involved in the acquisition of data and so has a goal which can be at variance to the primary producer. The necessary interchange of ideas, of course, is a reason for the Society to exist.

I would suggest that if the Society is concerned with information then it could consider its role in relation to post-secondary education. The reason for this lies in a recent publication—"Competence and Curriculum, A review of the national agricultural education system". This states that inadequate information is available about the educational needs of agriculture to permit optimal adjustments in the activities of institutions involved in post-secondary education. Given that the curricula are vocationally orientated, there is an urgent need to establish a means by which the

industry (primary producers, service industries etc.) have a greater say in designing curricula.

To enter this area will be difficult but as the Society has a cross section of agriculture represented, it could, together with similar bodies, make a major contribution. It needs to recognise that consensus may be difficult but surely the users of the education system should have a major input into its design. It may be able to remove the dominance of the educators in curricula design and place more emphasis on the users' contribution.

My view is that a shift to a system approach to teaching (this will be defined in various ways) is essential. The primary producer should have a better appreciation of the system than specialists with a particular bias. The tools for such teaching are available but because of inertia in the system, implementation is slow and difficult. A change in philosophy of education may also be required.

REFERENCE

EVANS, T. R. (1982)—The Tropical Grassland Society of Australia—A perspective. *Tropical Grasslands* **16**: 3–8.

STUDIES ON THE GERMINATION, PHENOLOGY AND RHIZOBIUM REQUIREMENTS OF *VIGNA PARKERI*

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ABSTRACT

Vigna parkeri *is a prostrate herbaceous legume, producing many stolons which root readily at the nodes. It has shown promise in grazed swards and may have a role in pastures in the higher rainfall coastal zone of southern Queensland and northern New South Wales. There is no registered cultivar. The* V. parkeri *accessions used in this study flowered in May–July, and the pods tended to shatter. It has up to 96% hard seed content, which does not change after 3 years laboratory storage. After scarification, with acid or by mechanical abrasion, good germination to 82% is achieved. Optimum temperature for germination was 25°C, and germination was delayed at temperatures above 27°C, and markedly reduced at temperatures above 35°C. There was little reduction in germination at temperatures between 12.5 and 25°C.* V. parkeri *formed nodules with a wide range of strains of* Rhizobium. *Eleven of 19 strains tested supported plant dry weight yields equal to or above 70% of that of a N control.*

INTRODUCTION

Vigna parkeri is described as a perennial climbing or prostrate herb, with slender stems often rooting at the nodes (Verdcourt 1970). Leaves have three round to ovate lanceolate leaflets. Inflorescences are axillary with 2–5 flowers, blue or yellow or white in colour. Pods are 1 to 3 cm long, with 2 to 5 seeds, grey to brown with black mottling. *V. parkeri* may form dense mats in the field with stolons 1 to 2 m long. It is able to grow in association with sward forming grasses.

Vigna parkeri was introduced into Australia from Kenya and Uganda in the 1950's, and was evaluated by CSIRO at the Beerwah Research Station in South East Queensland. It was not considered at that time to be particularly useful probably because at that time the prime selection criteria was based on yield. However, by 1975 it had spread into adjacent Pangola grass *Digitaria decumbens* paddocks, where it persisted under continuous grazing and had increased by 1980 to a frequency of 53%, (Jones 1980). By April 1982 frequency was 94% and presentation yields with set stocking at 2.2 animals per hectare of up to 1650 kg per hectare had been recorded.