

Introduction

The Australian Tropical Forages Genetic Resource Centre (ATFGRC) is one of 9 genetic resource centres that service the needs for Australia. Most of these centres conserve collections of exotic species, with the ultimate aim of developing new and improved cultivars.

The ATFGRC collection of tropical forages is probably the world's largest. In addition, it is responsible for conserving and developing the world's largest collection of root-nodule bacteria (RNB), which are an intrinsic adjunct to the development of successful pasture legumes. The collection was started in the 1940s–1950s but it was only with the development of storage conditions with controlled temperature and humidity in the 1960s that reliable seed storage became possible. The 1960s and 1970s saw a rapid expansion in development of tropical forage cultivars to support the expanding tropical Beef Industry.

The 1990s decade is one of rapid change, with a progressive decrease in Government funding for research and an increased requirement for industries to support financially research from which they ultimately derive benefit. For various reasons, there has been a decline in funding from the Beef Industry in the late 1990s; meanwhile, other industries have been seeking the development of new forage cultivars, including the Grains Industry (for ley crops) and the Mining Industry (for revegetating land disturbed by coal mining activities).

With changing opportunities and priorities, it seemed appropriate that the ATFGRC should examine its role and seek to determine the best

options for future research. To this end, a closed workshop was held with clients and potential clients at Marburg, south-east Queensland, on June 3–4, 1996. The title of the workshop was "*Forage Genetic Resources: Meeting the Requirements of Industry*". Papers were presented by clients and potential clients, including funding agencies, clients who are involved in developing cultivars of pasture plants from CSIRO and the Queensland Department of Primary Industries, graziers, and merchants marketing seed and RNB. As well as clients concerned with the ATFGRC's extensive resource base of exotic tropical forages, potential clients concerned with developing the fledgling Australian Bushfoods Industry and with opportunities for work on native forages were also invited. Owing to concerns about some tropical forages having become environmental weeds, stakeholders with environmental concerns were invited to express their views.

This issue of *Tropical Grasslands* is devoted to covering the Proceedings of the Workshop. Papers presented provide an overview of perceived requirements of clients and the skills of current ATFGRC staff which can be harnessed to address these needs. The last paper summarises outcomes from the Workshop, which the ATFGRC sees as a blueprint for R&D for the remainder of the decade.

J.B. Hacker
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