

Australian Society of Animal Production Young Member Travel Award - 2008

Final Report

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In November 2008 I was fortunate to travel to South Africa as the inaugural winner of the ASAP young member travel award. Cape Town, South Africa, was the venue for the tenth world conference on Animal Production, held under the auspices of the South African Society for Animal Science and the World Association of Animal Production. The World Association of Animal Production was formed in 1965, with ASAP being one of the founding member societies. The aim of the association is to ensure the sustainability and profitability of animal production worldwide by promoting sound scientific, economic and political rationales. The association holds a conference every five years, the first being held in Rome in 1963.

The theme of the 2008 conference was 'new world; future world'. The various sessions focused on current and future technologies in animal production systems, animal nutrition, animal genetics and resource and environmental management. The overall theme of the conference was finding sustainable ways to increase animal production in the face of an ever-increasing world population, climate change and consumer demand for safe and organic agricultural products.

As expected for an animal production conference there was a major emphasis on physiological aspects of animal production such as health, nutrition and genetics. However, in what was a slightly novel experience for me, there was also a strong focus on the consequences of animal production on human health. To this end, the nutrition requirements of both affluent and economically marginal societies were discussed in relation to animal products. The ability to manipulate animal production to meet the need, for example, of African infants who are severely malnourished, is a particularly relevant area as the world's population increases at an exponential rate. Several talks by human nutritionists focused on manipulating animal production to deliver increased quantities of individual nutrients then simply increasing production *per se*. So, for example, it may be beneficial to focus on increasing the proportions of certain proteins and/or fatty acids in ruminant milk through nutrition and genetic selection, rather than simply increasing milk production. This 'individual nutrient' approach allows animal products to be targeted to varied markets such as affluent societies, where obesity is a major problem, and vulnerable societies where malnutrition is rife.

The other major focus of the conference was on various biotechnologies and their current and future applications to animal production. The merits of technologies such as cutting-edge genomic tools, hormonal implants to increase reproductive efficiency and international benchmarking of bull sires were all discussed. The balance between increasing production (and therefore profit) and the boundaries of what is ethical and sustainable proved a hot topic. Amid the focus on cutting-edge technological tools, there were several very pertinent presentations, including a couple by Australian scientists, which focused on using a thorough understanding of the physiology of farm animals to increase production through natural means, thus promoting a 'clean, green and ethical' approach to animal production.

For me personally, it was a very beneficial experience to present a poster at the conference and discuss my work with scientists from all over the world. I am working with parasites in sheep and parasitology, particularly parasite resistance to chemical treatment, is a topic that is relevant in all facets of animal production from subsistence farmers in Africa to the most advanced production systems in Europe, North America and Australia. Of course, it was not all work and no play, and the conference dinner at a winery in Stellenbosch was a fantastic example of African culture with traditional entertainment and a spread of every roasted meat imaginable, including springbok, warthog and antelope. And the cable car to the top of Table Mountain is a sight that is justifiably regarded as one of the top tourist attractions in Africa. Overall it was a tremendous experience and I am grateful to ASAP for providing me with the opportunity.