

# GRASSLAND CONFERENCE IN SOUTHLAND

**F**ARMERS from Southland, Otago, Canterbury, and even further afield, and research and extension workers from many parts of New Zealand must have benefited considerably from the papers, discussions, and visits to farms that were arranged for the 12th annual conference of the New Zealand Grassland Association in Invercargill on November 1, 2, and 3. Delegates from ancillary industries such as fertiliser manufacturing companies and the seed trade also attended.

**T**HE series of papers was arranged so that in the first two days subjects of particular interest to Southland were presented in a chronological order beginning with the formation of the soils of the district and extending through the evolution of farming in Southland from utilisation of the native tussock vegetation to its present status as largely intensive grassland farming.

## Open Forums

The large attendances at the sessions of the conference were intensely interested in the technical papers, and subsequent open forum discussions had frequently to be arbitrarily closed to allow proceedings to continue.

Two excellent papers given by local farmers allowed technical workers to ask pertinent questions of practical men, and additional value was received from these discussions during subsequent visits to the properties of these farmers.

It was obvious that the open debates after each paper were most appreciated, and length of papers might have been restricted with advantage to enable fuller opportunity for all those wishing to add to the discussion.

Fuller participation of practical farmers in the programme of papers and shorter papers to allow of more discussion might add to the value of future conferences.

There can be no gainsaying, however, that the aim of the conference in stimulating discussion of the district's agricultural problems between technical men and practical farmers on a common ground was achieved. That there were sharp differences of opinion and some inconclusive debate was a measure of success rather than failure. There was an impression that each side went away with something to think about.

## Some Impressions

Some impressions of the conference were that the great increases in carrying capacity achieved by the intensive liming and draining programme of the past 20 to 30 years in Southland had been accompanied by several major problems. For solutions to or alleviation of some of these, farmers were frankly grateful. Inoculation of sheep



Mr. D. Macpherson addressing delegates when they attended his farm at Waianiwa on the afternoon of the first day of the Grassland Association's conference.

with the blackleg vaccine was highly commended as an insurance against losses from blood poisoning; application of cobaltised superphosphate had been an undoubted success in cobalt-deficient areas, but it appeared also to be beneficial to pastures outside the recognised deficient areas; D.D.T. and "Gammexane" superphosphate were of great assistance in the control of grass-grub. Farmers owed a lot to plant breeders for the new Club Root Resistant rape. Unthriftness of lambs in December and January when the ewes' milk failed and lambs were dependent on grass had produced a crop of theories. They included the assumption that continual liming and heavy stocking had built up excess fertility to a point where some considered that the taking of a crop of wheat might readjust the balance.

Advocacy of special-purpose pastures and the special grazing management they required for quick establishment and full utilisation of their nutritional qualities was met by spirited defence of existing pastures from which good production was being achieved. Local opinion on the use of cattle with sheep to control pasture growth was divided.

## Some Convictions

Statistical records confirmed the visual evidence on farms visited that a high level of grassland farming has been achieved. Present management is well adapted to best utilisation of existing swards.

More use of the plough to establish pastures of better botanical composition with a wider spread of utilisation and a "shortening of the winter at both ends" could decrease the dependence on supplementary root crops and increase carrying capacity. The additional livestock units should be cattle rather than more sheep.

There is a great potential for increased production in the sowing to pasture of red tussock and reverted areas after ploughing, fallowing, liming, and taking of cruciferous crops.

## Future Conferences

Membership of the Grassland Association is open to all those interested in grassland. With conferences held in each island in alternate years, a great opportunity is offered for the extension of grassland knowledge by the personal discussion of progress and problems affecting the principal factor on which the Dominion's agricultural production depends. Next year's conference is to be at New Plymouth and that in 1952 probably at Timaru. The third day's papers on original grassland research are of sufficiently wide interest to encourage the attendance of all pastoral farmers. Support of local farmers is essential to the full realisation of the aims of the association.

—G.J.N.