AUSTRALIA'S CONTRIBUTION TO OVERSEAS ANIMAL PRODUCTION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES - WORKING IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD

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I. THE DECISION TO GO

When a candidate considers the possibility of working overseas he is usually considering a specific job in a particular country and has a specific duty station in mind, with a detailed description of the duties and responsibilities he will be expected to perform. In addition there will be a stated salary and allowances and listed qualifications regarded as essential and desirable. All this appears thoroughly reasonable - the job is challenging, stimulating and worthwhile, the salary is generous and the allowances attractive. In some cases prospective candidates are supplied with information on living conditions and a general outline of the project. It all seems straightforward, but is it?

Strangely it is very often not any of these apparently important details that will determine whether or not a successful applicant will make a success of the job, enjoy his work and make a positive contribution to the development of a newly emergent nation. It is proposed to discuss some of the factors which need consideration when a prospective candidate is making a decision to work in animal production in the developing world.

(a) Motive and Qualification

Motive is fundamental to making a decision. If a worker overseas has undertaken a job with the wrong motivation he will rapidly become frustrated, bitter, and a focal point for discontent and trouble in a project. Rather than enter realms philosophical concerning motives, attention is drawn to some motives which can prove disastrous to the individual.

To think that work in a developing country will improve career opportunities in the home country is dangerous and, in fact, any improvement is likely to be inversely proportional to the amount of time spent overseas. Although an enlightened attitude to overseas work is emerging, it is still true to say that most employers 'feel that overseas experience is not relevant to the local scene and that even good local experience prior to working abroad is of diminishing value. the longer the person has been away. To be motivated by what appears to be high salaries is another pitfall, since saving money overseas, particularly for married people, is difficult in the first few years because the cost of living is often very high. An overzealous desire to help the "poor starving millions", to revolutionize agriculture

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with superior technology, or to change the primitive ways of indigenous peoples are motives which can endanger the individual's mental health if he becomes frustrated by the enormity of the job, the slow rate of progress, or his inability to communicate his ideas to the people. At the same time it is recognised that compassion, enthusiasm and ability to work with people are necessary components in the character of an overseas worker but should not be the major factor.

Dr. Sundaram Krishnamurthi, who has been on both sides of aid programmes, having been an Indian Director of Agriculture and a Project Manager for FAO, recently presented a monograph entitled "This Business of Technical Assistance - its Rights and Wrongs" (Krishnamurthi 1977). He quotes a 1974 estimate of the size of the technical assistance programme to the donor countries: two billion U.S. dollars spread over about 100 countries and employing 100,000 people, of which about 10% were U.N. experts. He goes on to point out that the quality of international staff is still one of nine major problem areas identified by a 25-man team of specialists working on a new U.N. global structure for economic co-operation. Dr. Krishnamurthi also summarises the suggestions from many people who have worked in the field of technical assistance as to the qualities needed in an expert; his list contains 12 lengthy clauses and concludes with the remark: "If all these qualities could be found in one man, he should be inaugurated as the President of the United States!"

A not dissimilar suggestion had been previously published in 1971 in the FAO "House News". This apt but amusing snippet is quoted in its entirety: "An expert, in addition' to his technical knowledge, must have the following qualifications:

The dignity of an Archbishop,
The idealism of a Missionary,
The behaviour of an Ambassador,
The durance of a Fiscal Officer,
The experience of an Economic Leader,
The genius of a Nobel Prize Winner,
The optimism of a Shipwrecked Seaman,
The eloquence of a Minister,
The cleverness of a Lawyer,
The flexible conscience of a Politician,
The health of an Olympic Fighter,
The smile of a Film Star,

The thick skin of an Elephant!"

(b) The Post

Consideration of the living conditions at a specific duty station seems relatively straightforward, especially when a job offer is accompanied by a "Living Conditions in XXXXX" but these have a habit of being some years out of date. Then the duty station cannot be found on any map and nobody contactible has been in the country for at least 10 years. The desired information can usually be discovered by diligent research in libraries and travel magazines, and embassy staff may help, with international airlines and hotel chains worth contacting.

Some of the answers most difficult to get are concerned with:

(i) the availability of housing, including its suitability and the rental,
(ii) the availability of all household requisites including foods,
(iii) the electricity voltage and cycles, and the types of wall fittings,
(iv) the most suitable motor vehicle for the country, taking into account the price of petrol, spare part availability and resale, and
(v) special family requirements including schools, clothing and footwear, jobs for wives.

Incorrect and out-of-date answers to many of these questions can cause considerable anguish to all members of the family, not to mention the fact that they can result in large financial losses. When no recent resident of the country is available it may pay to contact the employer, by cable if time is short, to ask specific questions before incurring large expenses.

It is a much more difficult task to consider in which countries you would, or would not, be prepared to work. While not suggesting that press stories are unfounded it is often true that the living conditions in most countries are not as risky as many Australians are led to believe. At the same time care must be taken to avoid obvious trouble-spots. A disputed border area is not the best place to take the family for a quiet Sunday picnic, nor is it advisable to walk down dimly-lit back streets of many overseas cities at night any more than it would be recommended in Melbourne or Sydney. Personal security is in fact better in a great many overseas countries than in Australia, especially if common sense is used.

Language requirements should be considered in the light of the candidate's ability to learn a new language if this is essential for his work. In some cases the whole family may have to consider this question since shopping, visits to the doctor, and even education may have to be conducted in a foreign tongue. An ability to communicate in a language is much more important than great proficiency. Australians often find languages difficult to master because they are not used to speaking or hearing them and have a fear of making a fool of themselves in front of others with superior linguistic ability: It is worth remembering, however, that even a few words and phrases of a local language will often prove useful in breaking down barriers.

(c) Family Requirements and Attitudes

A single person working overseas has a great deal more flexibility in the type and location of assignment he, or she, can accept than has a married couple, especially if they have children accompanying them. In passing it should be mentioned that, while some countries are better in this regard than many "developed" countries, some do not readily accept female workers as equal to similarly qualified males. Being unmarried may have its advantages but married personnel are less likely to become homesick or suffer from loneliness provided all family members are happy.

In deciding whether or not to accept a post, the attitude of the spouse is as important as that of the candidate. The spouse, usually a wife, may have a career to pursue, in which case employment
opportunities—become important, or, more commonly, there are family education problems to consider. At other times there may be concern about the availability of medical services, especially when young children are involved or when additional children are planned. Wives are faced with more different problems, often when they are alone, than they would encounter in their home country.

Employment in technical assistance programmes with multi-national organizations overseas is most commonly based on fixed-term contracts which can be terminated with one month notice, and there is no guarantee that there will be another position available. This job insecurity and its uncertain career opportunity worries wives more than husbands and causes marital tension. International financial crises can result in widespread, sudden retrenchments, and new assignments may take months to eventuate. Because of the stresses of these periods of insecurity, wives can become disenchanted with their husband's employer, and this in turn can affect their loyalty—and hence, perhaps, the morale of field staff. Fortunately, bilateral assistance does not have this problem to the same extent, especially where the worker is on secondment from his job at home.

An unhappy and insecure person will not do effective work in a developing country and it must be emphasized that the attitude of his family and their support will have a very large bearing on his ability to carry out his assignment successfully. The attitudes of all members of the family must be carefully considered before deciding to work overseas and this makes it very important that the requirements of the whole family are met. If they are not, dissatisfaction will occur; dissatisfaction on the part of the worker, his family, his employer and the recipient government.

On the positive side, working overseas provides all members of the family with travel opportunities and all the benefits of living and working in different cultures. It is also true to say that living abroad will result in a great many lasting friendships with people from all corners of the earth.

II. THE ASSIGNMENT

(a) The Changing Nature of Technical Assistance in Animal Production

Before discussing the individual's problems in carrying out his project it is proposed to review briefly how technical assistance has, and is, changing throughout the developing world in regard to livestock industries. Professor D.E. Tribe, in an address presenting the FAO East African Livestock Survey in Nairobi in 1967, drew attention to three prerequisites for the development of a livestock industry:

(i) a strong desire on the part of the local inhabitants for change, which is closely linked to the level of education in the community,

(ii) a suitable system of land tenure, and

(iii) a readily available source of agricultural credit.

Many schemes have failed because all these prerequisites were not met prior to undertaking the work.
Animal production can be conveniently classified into two types, which are very different as far as their development requirements are concerned.

(i) The traditional (subsistence) forms may involve a very wide range of species besides the ones common in Australia, e.g., goats, camels, buffalo, yak, llama, alpaca, guinea pigs etc., all of which are important sources of protein. Many areas, some with very high production potential, still use this type of production. The main constraints to change in these places are: a low level of literacy, tribal and religious beliefs, land tenure and sociological problems, and lack of trained personnel and capital. Development is thus slow, expensive and difficult to accomplish, so higher priorities are being given to projects capable of a more rapid economic return.

(ii) The commercial farm forms follow enclosure and land demarcation. Various levels of sophistication are found, from those similar to all forms of livestock farm found in Australia, to co-operatives and "group" farms. Ultimately countries will have to plan an integrated industry-wide development, not only on a species basis but also taking into account full community development and land-use planning. Such integrated development must include marketing, processing and import/export implications.

Until about 15 years ago the principal constraint to animal production was animal health and, as a consequence, there was a great demand for veterinarians, which was met largely from the former colonial veterinary services. With improvement in techniques, vaccines, insecticides and methods of treatment, factors other than diseases and parasites have become increasingly more important as constraints to production. While veterinary skills remain of fundamental importance, there has grown a demand for the skills of the animal nutritionist, the geneticist, the husbandman and the pasture and forage expert.

All these points have contributed to changes in the general nature of the work and projects now being undertaken by animal production specialists throughout the developing world. The early emphasis on training national staff to tackle the animal health problems has not yet finished, nor has the era of surveys and development plans, but, as increasing numbers of nationals fill the top posts in their governments, they are doing more of this work for themselves. Pilot schemes and feasibility studies are giving way to large-scale investment projects financed by international development banks. This latter type of project is being limited by a lack of trained and experienced management personnel. There is also a great shortage of international staff capable of training managers to run the commercial production enterprises.

As a country's resources become limiting and intensification becomes more necessary, assistance is increasingly needed to develop national research facilities to solve the inevitable problems associated with the more intensive forms of animal production. As a consequence of the expected production increases, assistance will be needed to plan and develop new processing and marketing facilities. The rising level of education throughout the developing world is gradually awakening the vast traditional sector to the possibilities of change, and this is giving
rise to a number of integrated rural development schemes where animal production is often only one of many factors.

Because Australia has recently undergone a number of similar changes, and because its environment is similar to that of many developing countries, Australian animal production specialists have a great deal to contribute, particularly in all aspects of the production of grazing ruminants.

(b) Success or Failure?

The expert/counterpart system has been the main one used up to the present day. This system was relatively easy to evaluate since, if at the conclusion of a project the counterpart was able to successfully continue, the project was judged a success; if it collapsed it was a failure. Mubyarto (1970) reviewed the expert/counterpart system and suggested that the key for a harmonious collaboration is mutual trust and respect between the two experts and a strong belief that 'each one is in need of the other. This author also stressed the need for local experts to be thoroughly briefed. In a number of countries the system has broken down because there have not been enough trained counterparts to supply local personnel to the foreign expert.

Krishnamurthi (1977) cites the Consultative Committee of the Colombo Plan, in their 1974 review of technical assistance, as defining ten problem areas.

(i) Foreign experts failed to transfer technology.
(ii) Training courses given to counterparts were not suited to the country.
(iii) Administrative delays on the part of both the donor and recipient seriously affected the results of the project.
(iv) Counterpart arrangements were often unsatisfactory or inadequate.
(v) There was frequently a failure to link assistance to the country's development plan.
(vi) Projects were not phased out within the specified time.
(vii) There was a growing need, where technical skills already exist, not to tie equipment to the acceptance of experts.
(viii) Recipient countries preferred untied aid so that they could select experts, purchase equipment or send their nationals for training where it was most appropriate or economically beneficial.
(ix) Regional development and research facilities should be developed to study problems of common interest.
(x) There should be an increasing amount of technical co-operation between the developing countries.
The first four problem areas have a direct bearing on the expert/counterpart system which is still the best available despite its imperfections. Because large amounts of money have been mis-spent in the past, donor countries and agencies insist on experienced development personnel to supervise their aid programmes. But recipient countries are becoming increasingly resentful of such "policing" especially as they feel they have the professional capacity to carry out the programme. The failure of projects to set realistic goals is another problem which can be put in another way, as an overoptimistic view of what can be achieved within a given time. Project planners in both donor and recipient countries are equally guilty and they leave the man in the field with the problem of trying to achieve the impossible. Feasibility studies are another method of delaying progress. There have been cases where many such studies have revealed that a project has a good chance of success, but still no development takes place. Conversely, there have been cases where feasibility studies have shown that a project will fail, and, despite this, the project has proceeded to its logical conclusion - failure.

In order to overcome these types of problem a team approach must be used, teamwork not only between the donor and recipient but also between the various assisting agencies. Cases do exist where multi- and bi-lateral agencies have worked well together on the same project, or on integrated projects, but frequently there has been antagonism. Antagonism has been fostered at times by the recipient country so that they can play off one donor against another to get a better deal. Some donor countries are extremely secretive about their programmes, presumably so that individual directors or their countries can gain more kudos, but this makes co-operation with them difficult.

Technical assistance should be above such pettiness and politics. How often is the foremost thought in the mind of planners that it is necessary to increase production by about 40% every ten years solely to maintain the present unsatisfactory per capita consumption levels? All aid projects and programmes must make a positive contribution and this will be more likely to occur if achievable goals are set and their attainment speeded up with greater teamwork at all levels.

The parts of the rim of a wheel and its five spokes have been used by Mosher (1966) to symbolically represent agriculture on the move. The five spokes he suggests are: markets, new technology, local availability of supplies and equipment, adequate farmer incentives, and transportation facilities. As a wheel can be accelerated by ball bearings, grease and tyres he suggests that agricultural development can be accelerated by: education for development, production credit, group action by farmers, improving and expanding agricultural land, and planning. Mosher also points out that most people are concerned with their own specialised tasks rather than this overall view. He suggests that these tasks all require certain characteristics if they are to serve the cause of agricultural development:

(i) work-hard work, careful work, continuous work, long hours, years and years of work;

(ii) learning - a developing agriculture is always changing, thus there is always a need to learn;

(iii) experimentation - better ways to do things do not come from "experts" but from experimenting; it is the persistent
experimenter who, failing often, sometimes succeeds;
(iv) empathy - the ability to see things from the other person's point of view.

III. THE FUTURE

There are two aspects to be discussed concerning the future of work in animal production in developing countries. The first concerns Australia's ability to contribute and the second concerns the plight of the individual who has been employed in this type of work.

(a) Australia's Potential

There is little doubt that tertiary training in the animal sciences in Australia is equal to the best in the world. This is because Australian agriculture itself requires a thorough understanding of many different types of environments as well as a sound knowledge of the principles of animal production. Thus, Australian animal production workers and veterinarians quickly adapt to new environments and realise how to apply the techniques which will result in increased production. But they are not trained to deal with the sociological, political or economic problems of the developing world.

Increasingly, donor governments are realising that the best method of training young graduates in development work is 'in service - in the field". As a consequence, U.N.D.P. and the agencies, including F.A.O., have organized the Associate Expert Scheme. This programme, financed by the country donating the young, inexperienced graduates, gives them two or three years opportunity to work under the supervision of an experienced officer in developing countries. After this period, the "Associate" may go into his own country's bilateral aid programme or carry on as a "full expert". It is noticeable today that many Project Managers', and senior, positions in F.A.O. are being filled by former Associate Experts. It is appropriate to ask: where are the Australian Associate Experts? Where can young Australian animal scientists go to contribute to animal production in the developing world? Where can they go to gain experience in development work? In a few years time, will the question become: where are the Australians in senior positions in the multinational development agencies?

Australian animal production specialists have a great deal to offer the developing countries, particularly in all aspects of ruminant production, including pasture production. It is perhaps unfortunate that, for valid political reasons, relatively few Australians are working overseas in countries which have a high potential to increase their production from ruminants. It is hoped that this will change in the future.

(b) The Individual

If he has successfully juggled with contracts for fifteen years or so, the individual worker can look forward to a reasonably generous pension when he reaches retirement age. As already stated, he is unlikely to be given favourable treatment should he seek employment at home with a State Department of Agriculture, C.S.I.R.O., or a University.
It is true, however, that a number of European countries are now recognizing this problem and are offering special refresher training for people who have served overseas. Australia is not equipped to do this at present, nor does she have schools of development studies, in her universities, which might offer jobs to a few.

The development specialist really has limited opportunity to stop working overseas except by leaving agriculture altogether and setting up in business. The other alternative is to undertake a certain amount of consultancy work, although this usually involves more travelling and lengthy separations from the family.

In conclusion, working overseas in developing agriculture is challenging, is worthwhile, is important is satisfying and is interesting to anyone who tries it. But —

The longer one works overseas, the less useful you are considered as a worker in your home country; the quicker one can hand over a job in a developing country to one of its nationals, the more successful you are as a worker. The development specialists may ultimately fail to find a job! Robert Browning put these sentiments very succinctly in "Rabbi Ben Ezra":

"For thence, a paradox
Which comforts while it mocks, —
Shall life succeed in that it seems to fail:
What I aspired to be,
And was not, comforts me:
A brute I might have been, but would not sink in the scale".

REFERENCES


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