SYMPOSIUM 3

PRIORITIES AND POLICIES FOR ANIMAL PRODUCTION IN AUSTRALIA

R.M. CARRAIL

INTRODUCTION

Low prices for animal products, together with severe cost pressures, have created a difficult and uncertain situation for animal production in Australia. Whereas Symposium 4 "The Cost Price Squeeze and the Livestock Industries" examines shorter term measures to arrest or to offset declining terms of trade, this Symposium takes a longer term view and looks critically at the potential for animal production. This potential is examined from the point of view of the biology of animal production, but also considers the economic and social framework within which the potential for production should be exploited.

From this examination, priorities and policies for animal production in Australia can be reviewed. What, for example, are the implications for research in animal production, for extension, for developing the knowledge and skills of producers and for marketing of animal products?

In the past, expansion of production was the critical objective but objectives are changing to enable effective adjustments in animal production to market needs and opportunities. This does not of course exclude the possibility of expansion of production.

Further, policies for animal production must increasingly consider other ways in which resources can be used. Problems of conservation of resources and possible conflicts in resource use are emerging.

Economic changes have also brought with them a range of sociological changes affecting, not only those directly involved in animal production but also the wider rural community.

The rate of increase in productivity in the animal industries has been high and continued increases in productivity are important. To raise productivity, appropriate technology must be available, together with the resources of capital to apply this technology. Many people find it increasingly difficult to see where gains in productivity might continue to be made, while others see great potential still through unused available technology and that which might be developed through research.

* Victorian Department of Agriculture, Melbourne
All of these aspects are raised in the papers presented to this symposium. The papers provide a sound basis for discussion of priorities and policies for animal production in Australia, particularly for the sheep and cattle industries.