The livestock revolution - ILRIC

A group of nine organisations in Armidale has received the green light to establish the world’s foremost livestock information centre following a $4.5M injection of funds from the Commonwealth Government. This will be matched $ for $ by the participants to make $9M which will then be multiplied up through an expected series of third-party corporate contracts to perhaps $80M over the next few years. The aim is to position Australia’s livestock producers to reap maximum benefit from the Livestock Revolution that is predicted to see demand for livestock food products double by 2020.

The new organisation will be called the International Livestock Resources and Information Centre (ILRIC). It is a virtual research facility whose role is to coordinate the rapid provision of knowledge emanating from the research of participating organisations. The start-up funds came from the Government’s Major National Research Facilities program as part of the Coalition’s program for “Backing Australia’s Ability”.

The participating organisations are the University of New England, Agricultural Business Research Institute, Beef CRC, Sheep CRC, Animal Genetics and Breeding Unit, Veterinary Health Research, Institute for Rural Futures, Australian New Frontiers and breed societies. They will pool resources to establish a world class knowledge base for the livestock industries with particular emphasis on livestock genetics and animal health.

The knowledgebase will be indexed and held on fast computers from which it will be accessible worldwide, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. To cope with the high enquiry level expected and other aspects of the project, UNE plans to increase tenfold the speed of its access to the Internet.

The project addresses the greatest deficiency in livestock research, namely, the significant lag in time of getting research outcomes out to livestock producers in the form of decision making tools that increase productivity and profitability. Under ILRIC, the huge databases of ABRI and the CRCs’ will be available on the Internet and producers will be able to access this data using a business intelligence system to assist their decision making.

In January, I was elected as Chairman of the ILRIC Steering Committee which is getting all the agreements with the Commonwealth in place. The software task to create knowledgebases, the access and security procedures and the business intelligence applications will be enormous. A team of around 20 software developers will be assigned in part of in full to the project.

And the project won’t stop with Australia’s livestock industries but extend worldwide – particularly to developing countries that are in desperate need of higher livestock productivity to service the nutritional needs of a burgeoning human population. Welfare aspects of the project rank highly in the priorities.

The timing of the project is ideal. It means that ILRIC will be providing comprehensive information systems at the very time when Telstra is rolling out many enhancements to its Internet services to rural Australia – particularly by satellite communications to producers in remote areas.

By May, 2002 it is anticipated that ILRIC will have a Board of Management operating under the Chairmanship of Dr. Bruce Standen, a UNE graduate who was until recently Managing Director of the Australian Meat & Livestock Corporation.

It is a great boost to the prestige of Australia’s livestock research community to win a MNRF. The ILRIC proposal is the only successful MNRF that will be driven entirely from a regional base – so a lot of eyes will be watching our progress. Over time the ILRIC proposal is expected to contribute over $1 billion to the Australian economy through increasing the productivity of our livestock.

Arthur Rickards

New Genetic/Internet Services Book
The Australian Registered Cattle Breeders Association (ARCBA) hosted a very successful Beef Technology Seminar at the Brisbane Exhibition in August, 2001. The papers have now been edited into a book which provides valuable guidelines on how to combine genetic and information technology to boost the profitability of beef production.

Please forward a copy of the Beef Technology book to:
Name: ________________________________
Address: ______________________________
Postcode: ______________________________

ARCBA, C/ABRI, University of New England, Armidale NSW 2351

My Cheque for $22 including GST is enclosed with order.