

JAMES RENNIE BEQUEST

REPORT ON EXPEDITION/PROJECT/CONFERENCE

Expedition/Project/Conference Title: 42nd Congress of the International Society for Applied Ethology.

Travel Dates: 4th – 10th August 2008.....

Location: Dublin, Ireland.....

Group Member(s): Jenny Gibbons

Aims: To attend the 42nd Congress of the International Society for Applied Ethology.

OUTCOME (not less than 300 words):-

The main theme of the congress was “**Addressing future challenges in animal agriculture**”. The conference took place over 5 days and incorporated approximately 113 spoken and 138 poster presentations. The sessions covered topics such as behavioural indicators of health and welfare, housing and environment in cattle, emotion, cognition and learning, grazing behaviour, breeding and genetics, automated data collection methods and social behaviour. These topics have direct relevance to my current research area but also to areas that I hope to research in the future. The congress represents the largest gathering of animal ethologists (approximately 402 delegates) in the world and thus the widest possible audience for my research.

I presented a paper entitled ‘The effect of selective breeding for fitness traits on aggression during feeding in dairy cows’ in the open session on breeding and genetics. As a direct result of my presentation I have made contacts with researchers in Canada, Mexico, Ireland, Netherlands and here in the UK. It also gave me the opportunity to liaise with international ethologists at all levels in my discipline in both formal and informal settings.

Attendance at the conference also enabled me to learn about the most current research in animal ethology worldwide. There was an interesting focus on health and welfare of farm animals. This was thought provoking and relevant to a small study on lameness in dairy cows that I am providing technical support to. I took the opportunity to attend presentations primarily on ruminant welfare but also on a number of different species from researchers around the world.

I attended an evening discussion workshop on “The influence of genetics and breeding on farm animal welfare”. The workshop included presentations by Dr. Buitenhuis from University of Aarhus in Denmark, Dr. Quilter from University of Cambridge and Dr. Hagen from Europäische

Akademie in Germany. As a result of my attendance at this workshop I gained a detailed insight into the various different types of research that is on-going investigating the effect of genetics on animal welfare.

I was very keen to make the most out of my visit to Ireland by gaining a better insight into agriculture practices as well as current research areas. I visited the Teagasc Grange Beef Research Centre and European Commission Food and Veterinary Office (FVO). Teagasc Grange Beef Research Centre provides research information on all aspects of beef production including genetics and breeding, beef production systems, grassland, forage conservation, nutrition, meat quality, animal welfare, labour use, the environment, systems modelling and reproduction. The resources available to the beef research programme include 250 ha of grassland, accommodation for over 1100 animals, facilities to individually feed 300 animals and a fully automated intake system for 100 animals. My visit to the beef centre gave me a detailed insight into the many challenges facing beef farming in the global economy, however Irish farmers benefit from a decoupled single farm payment system that gives them the opportunity of making decisions to adjust their farming methods based on economic returns from their farming enterprises. In addition, I learned of the extensive animal welfare research that is carried out at the Grange Beef Research Centre. This research includes projects investigating: The Welfare of Animals Transported from Ireland to Italy and from Ireland to Spain, Effects of Pre-Journey Fasting on the Physiological Responses of Young Cattle to 8-hour Road Transport, The Effect of Abrupt Weaning of Suckler Calves, Optimisation of Cattle Housing Systems for Beef Farmers among many more.

The FVO is a department of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Health and Consumer Protection and is 'the eyes and ears of the Commission', monitoring EU Member State and third country compliance with EU food safety legislation and animal welfare through its audits and inspections. It has 175 staff and although many have a veterinary background, other specialisations are also represented including agronomy, chemistry, biology, environmental health, medicine, economics and law. During my visit to the FVO I learned of the existing inspection services dealing with animal welfare within EU member states.

Conclusions

Attendance of the 42nd ISAE conference enabled me to introduce my research to a wider international audience as well as learn about similar research being carried out elsewhere, putting my work into a wider context. It provided international knowledge transfer of research carried out at SAC. On a more personal note, I feel that having the opportunity to meet with highly regarded researchers and presenting at an international conference of this level has greatly enhanced my

confidence. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the trustees for providing the funding to enable me to make this trip.