

CORNELL NUTRITION CONFERENCE – HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES UPDATE

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At the 1989 meeting, Dr. M. L. Scott from the Department of Poultry Science gave a presentation on the history of the Cornell Nutrition Conference. This paper is reprinted in the current proceedings for your information. The Cornell Nutrition Conference evolved from a Poultry Nutrition School initiated in 1934. In 1938, the Cornell Nutrition Conference (CNC) began when the Animal Husbandry and Poultry Departments jointly developed a nutrition conference for all farm animals. I encourage you to read Dr. Scott's paper for more details on the early days of CNC.

The Cornell Nutrition Conference has evolved as our feed industry, animal production industries and faculty resources have changed. The early conferences had a broad range of topics including farm economics, human nutrition and talks covering a wide range of animal species including dairy, beef, sheep, swine, fish, horses, poultry and pets such as dogs and cats. These talks represented the range of responsibilities that our conference participants worked with on a daily basis in their jobs. These topics were covered by a wide range of Cornell faculty and invited outside speakers. Over time, the focus of the conference has shifted to being primarily dairy related with a few papers on other species. A primary reason for this shift is that the job responsibilities of our participants are primarily dairy nutrition and management related.

There have been a number of other changes in our conference over the years. These include:

1. Meeting location – Dr. Scott outlined the reasons for the early conference moves from Ithaca to Buffalo and then to Syracuse in 1976. The conference moved from Syracuse to Rochester in 1990 since the number of conference participants had outgrown the size of the meeting room available in Syracuse. We returned to Syracuse in 2002 to our former meeting location that had been expanded in terms of being able to accommodate our group size. However, the primary reason for the move from Rochester was a change in hotel management. The Marriott in Rochester had been shifted to be the RIT Inn and Conference Center and was now considered a college facility. We discovered this when we arrived for the 2001 CNC meeting. As a result of this change in management, the bar was closed since part of the hotel rooms were now a college dormitory. The lack of a bar wouldn't sit well with our conference participants. We quickly arranged for a private party liquor license for the 2 nights of our conference. As a result, we moved back to Syracuse.

2. Conference attendance – Dr. Scott indicated that at one time 720 people attended the conference. Attendance was dropping in the late 1970's and early 1980's and hit a low point of about 161 individuals in attendance. Since that time, we have been able to build the attendance back to a relatively constant 350 to 400 participants in the last 10 years.
3. Budget – The conference struggled with some negative budgets in the late 1970's and early 1980's as attendance declined. This has reversed itself as attendance has increased and we now have a consistently positive budget balance.
4. Conference organization – Dr. R. J. Young assumed leadership of the conference from Dr. Scott. In 1985, I assumed the role of General Chairman for the conference. This has provided stability in terms of conference administration. A rotation system is used for a Program Chairman each year that is responsible for putting together the program topics and speakers. Another significant change has been designating one of our office professionals to assist with conference logistical details on a continuing basis. These individuals (Dee Brothers, Robin Huizinga, Heather Fredenburg, Lorissa Haines, Karen Holcomb and Heather Darrow) have made significant contributions to the success of CNC. They quickly develop a rapport with our conference participants and sponsors. The conference runs smoothly primarily due to their efforts.
5. Sponsors - In 1976, a decision was made to ask companies to provide donations to assist in partially funding CNC due to the negative budget situation that existed. There were 13 companies that provided support in 1976. Today, there are usually 50 – 60 companies that provide support for the conference. This financial support has helped us maintain lower registration fees and provides the ability to bring in outside speakers to participate in our conference. Many of these companies have been sponsors of CNC on a continuous basis.
6. Audience – The Cornell Nutrition Conference has evolved into a national and international conference. At the 2012 CNC, 38% of the participants were from New York. The audience consisted of individuals from 32 states in the U.S., 6 Canadian provinces and 10 foreign countries. Countries represented were Japan, South Arica, Italy, Brazil, France, China, Peru, Mexico, Turkey and New Zealand.
7. Technical Symposiums and Breakfasts – In 1983, Monsanto sponsored a technical symposium titled “Fundamental and Applied Aspects of Methionine in Nutrition” that preceded the CNC program. Beginning in 1989, companies have been sponsoring a preconference symposium and breakfasts for conference participants. These have been a valuable asset to our conference and provided additional technical information for our participants. The interest in doing this is high among companies and we are usually setting these up 2-3 years in advance of the actual date that the symposium or breakfast will be held.

8. Maynard Award – In 2001, we started providing an award to 1 – 2 graduate students based on their research program and accomplishments. This award honors Dr. L. A. Maynard who was an outstanding faculty member in the Animal Husbandry Department at Cornell from 1915 to 1955.
9. New York Feed Dealer Seminars - This series of programs was initiated in 1946 at the request of the New York State Feed Dealer's Association. The goal was to provide training and information to feed industry representatives at the local level that were unable to attend CNC. This series of seminars continues today at 7 locations throughout New York on an annual basis.
10. Special Symposia – These were organized by former graduate students and faculty colleagues to highlight the career contributions of Cornell faculty. Symposia honoring P. J. Van Soest, D. G. Fox, C. J. Sniffen, D. E. Bauman and J. B. Russell have been held. The impetus and effort in organizing these was done primarily by graduate students as recognition of the impact these individuals had on their careers and the industry.
11. Significant Papers – Given the many years of the conference and the number of papers presented each year, it is nearly impossible to make a short list of the most significant papers. The following papers are examples of ones presented that set the stage for a succession of papers on the same topic in the following years. This list only goes back to 1975 since that was my first direct involvement with CNC.
 - a. 1979 – Discount factors for energy and protein in ruminant feeds – P.J. Van Soest, J. Fadel and C.J. Sniffen. The 5th revision of this paper was in the 1992 CNC proceedings.
 - b. 1979 – A net protein system for formulating beef and dairy rations – D.G. Fox, C.J. Sniffen, P.J. Van Soest and P.H. Robinson. This paper set the stage for the Cornell Net Carbohydrate and Protein System (CNCPS) model. Papers related to CNCPS continue to be presented at the CNC meeting.
 - c. 1980 – Effect of exogenous growth hormone on nutrient utilization in high producing dairy cows – D.E. Bauman, C.J. Peel, R.C. Gorewit and C.J. Sniffen.
 - d. 1983 – Using neutral detergent fiber to formulate dairy rations and estimate the net energy content of forages – D.R. Mertens.
12. Discussion Sessions – For many years, there were some formal (and informal) evening discussion sessions associated with CNC. A popular one was having the conference speakers available for an open forum type session after the dinner on Wednesday night. This gave everyone a chance to ask almost any question and try to “stump the experts.” These could get quite lively and you never really knew which direction they would go or tangent they would follow. For many years, there was also an informal session held in a suite sponsored by the Fox Company. Ralph and Jack provided the suite, snacks and a variety of libations.

Again, they were free flowing and went in a variety of directions. At times, there were some very pointed debates and arguments on a variety of topics. However, everyone enjoyed the interaction that occurred in these sessions. They frequently went into the early morning hours but most people were still able to make it to the Thursday morning CNC program.

13. Most Unusual Paper – Through the years, there have been a number of papers presented at CNC on some nontraditional type topics. However, I feel that 1 paper stands out that our participants found very interesting, easy listening and a good change of pace. This paper is:

Sauropod dinosaurs and gigantism: a report of an international conference – P. J. Van Soest – 2009 CNC.

This paper was a report from an international conference held in Germany in 2008. Dr. Van Soest touched on subjects including homeothermy, blood pressure, types of plants consumed by herbivorous dinosaurs, gut microorganisms and fiber retention time. Since no direct measures were available for these in dinosaurs, speculations on some of these areas were made using large contemporary herbivores (elephants and rhinos).

The Cornell Nutrition Conference has shifted over time to meet the needs of our participants and the feed industry. The original goal when the conference was initially organized was to bring new, cutting edge research to the participants so that they could then use this information to the benefit of the producers they worked with on a daily basis. It also provided a forum to challenge the industry to look ahead and change the approaches they used in their daily business activities. The end result should be a strong, economically viable, environmentally responsible and sustainable animal production system. An integral component continues to be input from the feed industry sector on topics and speakers to be included on the program. This helps our Cornell group in assuring that the conference meets the needs of our audience. We will continue to provide new, cutting edge research to the industry and challenge the industry to look ahead in their business.

Thanks for your support! We appreciate our partnership with you and look forward to many more years of working with you to strengthen our industry and keep it moving ahead. Your feedback is essential for us to provide a conference of value to you. Enjoy the conference!