

Extending the Concept of Benchmarking in Farm Management

Dr Lisa Jack

University of Essex, United Kingdom

Benchmarking in agriculture is comparatively sophisticated. A recent review of practices in industry which ignored agriculture noted that network or learning groups were a new phenomenon yet such models are well established in New Zealand farming and elsewhere. The same underlying principles are evident in 'mass participation' benchmark (or comparative analysis) systems, where data is disseminated through publications, farm bureau and extension services.

Some farm groups are extending the use of benchmarking in their businesses in ways that are closer to 'process' benchmarking. The evidence here is drawn from primary research by the author, case studies from the UK and academic, professional and media articles.

Newer benchmarking models include internal benchmarking, employed where a number of farms are managed on similar lines. Another model centres on one particular cost or activity. Case studies include a Joint Venture Farming benchmarking group aimed at maximising efficient use of labour and machinery, lameness scoring for cattle and benchmarking by veterinarians for their clients based on specific ailments, such as mastitis. Monitor farms introduce experimental data into benchmarking.

Established benchmarking models aid adaptive innovation by farm managers. Emerging forms of benchmarking aid generative innovation. There is a real opportunity in farm management to extend the concept further to look not only at costs but at processes and specific non-financial measures. Farm management researchers and advisors should also explore the use of one-to-one benchmarking approaches employed elsewhere to extend best practice internationally, widening the tools available in the industry.

Key words: benchmarking, innovation, international, performance measures