

**The scientisation and medicalisation of livestock agriculture:
New perspectives on, and approaches to health,
breeding and production post-1945.**

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Abstract:

This panel will interrogate the roles of science, medicine and technology in modernising livestock production after the Second World War. It will integrate methodological considerations of how to investigate this problem with case studies from different national perspectives, which explore the processes through which production practices were transformed with the aid of new technologies and scientific and veterinary advice. These transformations were highly significant in enabling massive increases in the supply of livestock food at relatively little cost to the consumer. They were also highly controversial on account of the new threats that emerged to human health (such as zoonotic diseases and antimicrobial resistances), livestock welfare, and the environment. Yet surprisingly little is known about them. While historians have described post-WWII developments in agricultural policy, and performed statistical analyses that illustrate the expansion of livestock production and productivity, they have tended to neglect changes taking place at farm level, and how they shaped and were shaped by science, technology and veterinary medicine.

This panel will address this problem by considering the various tools and

practices that were mobilized to produce as much food from livestock as possible. These include: innovations in housing, feeding and stockmanship; new reproductive technologies; antimicrobials and other drugs such as hormones and vaccines; health surveillance and biosecurity; animal food science; record keeping and agricultural accounting. Papers will examine the various experts that were involved in developing these innovations and encouraging farmers to adopt them. In animal health, veterinarians played a leading role, but because livestock health was undermined by poor housing and feeding, and vets did not have exclusive control over drugs, they faced competition from many other actors, including state agricultural advisers, and representatives of feed and pharmaceutical companies. Moreover, farmers did not rely wholly on external experts. When changing their production practices they also drew on past experiences, personal assessments of the situation, and insights shared by other farmers - either in person or through the medium of farming magazines. It is therefore important to develop a broad perspective on how the knowledges and practices of modern livestock farming were produced, circulated and evaluated, and how expertise was negotiated.

Several members of the panel will present research findings that address these issues. Others adopt a more methodological perspective that focusses on the use of particular sources and approaches. Directing attention to such materials as the newly-digitised (and previously inaccessible) informational film material held at the Museum of English Rural Life (Reading, UK), specialist farming journals and magazines (that included photographs), advertising materials and advisory articles, grey literature produced by government and the unique value of oral histories, speakers will discuss the challenges and benefits of foregrounding farmers' perspectives on the past, and how, by working with scholars from other disciplines it is possible not only to enhance historical understandings but also to inform present-day approaches to livestock health and production.