



THE BETTER Farming Train

EH Zeck produced more than 2000 insect drawings in the 30 years he worked for the NSW Department of Agriculture. Among these illustrations were a series of watercolours, first revealed to a fascinated public as part of the Entomology Branch carriage on the Department's Better Farming Train which toured New South Wales in the late 1920s

↑ *Growing pasture samples on the Victorian Better Farming Train; State Records NSW: State Rail Authority, Photographic Reference Print Collection No 1110, [NUA 69]*

Both the NSW and Victorian governments established Better Farming Trains. The trains toured regional areas to educate local farming populations in the recommended agricultural and domestic science methods. Each train 'served as a travelling agricultural school, an experimental farm on wheels and a chance for a day out'.

State Records holds several records related to the trains in both states within its archival collection. Information about the NSW trains appears in reports of the Department of Agriculture to the NSW Parliament from 1927 to 29. And images documenting the Victorian Better Farming Train are to be found in a presentation album of photographs, sent to the NSW Assistant Railway Commissioner by his Victorian colleagues.



New South Wales Better Farming Train

1927 to 1929

'In the whole of the tours during 1927-29, the train travelled 8734 miles, visiting 146 towns. Lectures and demonstrations to the number of 609 were given, and it is estimated that 629 146 people visited the train.

The exhibits staged by the department touched the following: Agriculture, Veterinary Science, Dairying, Insects, Plant Diseases, Fruit-growing, Grasses, and Weeds, Wool, Sheep, Cattle, Poultry, Publications, Cinema. In addition the train included sleeping and dining for the staff, and water and store cars.

The main part of the train was designed to enable the staff to demonstrate in as practical a manner as possible the best methods of growing and handling crops, of breeding, feeding, and managing live stock, and controlling insect and fungus diseases. By exhibits of all kinds of produce, by photographs, and by diagrammatic representation of the results obtained from various methods, varied endeavours were made to convey to farmers the value of the Department's recommendations.

The train proved valuable too, in affording an opportunity for officers of the Department to get into direct touch with many farmers that seem out of reach of the ordinary avenues of propaganda. The transport to farmers' own towns or railway sidings of specimens of diseased and healthy crops, and of desirable types of farm animals (to mention only two spheres of instruction), together with the attendance of officers who could and

were pleased to be able to explain the significance of the exhibits and to deliver lectures at every station, was a novelty that attracted thousands at many centres. Though the departure involved long hours and close application, officers have much appreciated the contact obtained with a larger circle of producers.

The Department of Public Health furnished an exhibit and made available the services of a lecturer on maternal and baby welfare, and the Department of Education provided demonstrators in cookery, needlework, and home improvement, while the Rural Bank, the Water Conservation and Irrigation Commission, and the Registrar of Co-operative Societies sent representatives and furnished exhibits. The opportunity was taken by the Department of Labour and Industry to be represented on the train, and it is understood that useful work has been accomplished in connection with migration, and rural employment.

It was evident that the train served a very useful purpose in conveying to farmers the latest information at the disposal of the Department in regard to the most efficient farming methods, and in acquainting farmers with the class of service which the department is able to give them.'

Extracts from reports of the Department of Agriculture in New South Wales Parliamentary Papers, for the years 1927 to 1929

← A display of noxious weeds, edible grasses and wool on the Victorian Better Farming Train; State Records NSW: State Rail Authority, Photographic Reference Print Collection No 1110, [NUA 69]

→ Lecture on mothercraft; demonstration of the Babcock method for testing the butterfat content of milk; and a lecture on friesian cows, State Records NSW: State Rail Authority, Photographic Reference Print Collection No 1110, [NUA 69]

Victorian Better Farming Train

1924 to 1935

'The Better Farming Train steamed out of Melbourne for the first time in October 1924 bound for Gippsland. An engine towing fifteen carriages painted bright orange made a striking picture. Each carriage was fitted out with agricultural displays. Pigs, cows, poultry, bees, dairy utensils, potatoes, bacon, tobacco, manure, fodder and pasture samples and a range of expert lecturers were among items of interest carried on the train.

Upon arrival at a railway station, the train was prepared for exhibition. Cattle were walked out into the station yard; the sides of the pig truck were let down to enable farmers to view the animals; pasture plots were lowered to the platform and the display carriages were opened to the public. A series of lectures on subjects relevant to the area were conducted at each centre.

A popular display in most centres was the 'women's branch'. Lectures and demonstrations were given about infant welfare, cooking and clothing design. Mothers brought babies for examination by the nurse. 'A box of samples including aprons, knitted frocks, embroidery and riding pants aroused a great deal of interest' as did demonstrations of 'simple cooking with special consideration to dried fruits, soups, casseroles, re-cooked meats and pastry making'.

So eager was one woman in Gippsland to view the train that she rose at 3.30 am in order to milk the cows and get the children ready. She then drove over thirty miles to visit the Better Farming Train.'

Extracts from
<http://www.nre.vic.gov.au/virtualexhibition/>
on the website of the Victorian Department of Primary Industries

