

Editorial

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I am grateful to a colleague from our Editorial Board whose frustration at the somewhat restricted vision offered by another dairy science journal inspired this Editorial. It seems that in some parts of the world there may still be a view that only research done or published in that same part of the world is worth citing. I can remember this concern being expressed numerous times over several decades, and whilst I am not going to dwell on the specific Journal, I can say that the latest frustration was triggered by a recent review article, which omitted to mention a highly relevant piece of research done in the UK and published by us three years earlier. I have not cited as I do not wish to embarrass the authors, one of whom has Peer Reviewed for us several times (thank you!) Almost 90% of the cited references were research published and/or conducted in the one country or its continental neighbour, 65% of them being published in the one Journal. Please do not misinterpret my words as criticism or bitterness, I am simply expressing worry. I have a great deal of respect for the Journal in question: it has a strong reputation and a very committed following that explains much of its very high Impact Factor (it has a self-citation rating of 25%, a quarter of all citations received). A few years ago a sister Journal was launched, focused on shorter original and review articles and published Open Access. I presume that citations made in this newer Journal (as these were) will not count as self-citation for the original Journal, a happy consequence for the publishers. I would like to be able to say that this particular review is an exceptional occurrence, but I worry that it is probably not. That is not a parochial worry. Food security and environmental integrity are global concerns, so I am content that our own focus on global diversity is the correct vision for JDR. To some extent the preponderance of research from the one country is a simple consequence of funding, and my worry is that a sizeable chunk of that money could be devalued because the research is done in relative ignorance of what has been done before, elsewhere. Entering a simple search term covering the topic of interest into our JDR database finds more than 400 of our papers, many of which will be relevant, none of which were cited in the review. Do we repeat the fault? The two countries referred to above both figure in the top 5 of geographical origin for articles published recently in JDR, and between them have as much representation on our Editorial Board as any other country (there are 21 countries represented in total). I cannot quote data, but I am completely confident that analysis would reveal that the Journal cited most often by our JDR authors is the same one we have been discussing. Whilst it is nice to be virtuous, it would be even nicer if JDR's self-citation percentage (a lowly 6%) was to increase by a reasonable amount, so if you are a JDR author reading this, please cite the excellent research that we publish! I also worry that the much-needed expansion of research into parts of the world that do not have a history of scientific endeavour is not advancing as quickly as it could or should, in part at least because such research and researchers are, to some extent, shunned by the more established research community.

The wearing of scientific blinkers is not restricted to geographical citation bias. I am disappointed at the regularity with which authors cite a recent paper as evidence of an observation made (and published) very much earlier, and I have commented before on the remarkable priority afforded by many researchers to the simple acquisition and dissemination of data. So, a plea to my fellow scientists. I am very much aware of the time and funding pressures that we all endure, but please, try to be more aware of what has gone before, and to pay more attention to the problem and, especially, its solution. Our technological capabilities have increased enormously during the course of my scientific career, with the inevitable consequence that the acquisition of an all-encompassing knowledge has become ever more difficult, if not impossible. Most of the current generation of researchers are much more specialised and focused than my generation were, and I am not sure when I last heard the term 'generalist' applied to a scientific colleague. To my mind, this makes it even more imperative that we be aware of what is happening peripherally to the tunnel that stretches, invitingly, ahead of us. In that regard, our February issue includes two Research Reflection papers, both retrospective and both devoid of original data but both also, in my view, highly stimulating and thought-provoking. It would be nice to think that some of you would pick up on one or more of the ideas and questions put forward and do the research that provides answers. And if you do, you know who you should cite and where you should publish!