HONORARY LIFE MEMBERSHIP

Alan Henry Kirton is nominated for Life Membership of the New Zealand Society of Animal Production because of his contributions to the NZ Meat industry, to the Society and for his work lobbying for the profession of science during his research career.

Alan Kirton was born in Stratford in 1933 and spent his early life on a farm at Kohuratahi in the back country of Taranaki east. His parents ran a mixed dairy and sheep farm. He attended the Marco Primary School and then the Stratford Technical High School where he came under the influence of Mr H C Johnson, a teacher who influenced many promising agriculturalists including C P McMeekan. From Stratford he attended Victoria University for his agricultural intermediate before attending Massey University where he gained his BAgrSc (1956) and MAgrSc (First Class Honours in Sheep and Dairy Husbandry (1958) working with Bob Barton. While at Massey he received the Lord Bledisloe Prize, the George Terry Memorial Scholarship, the Senior Scholarship in Agriculture (declined), a NZ Wool Board Scholarship and a Shell Oil Co. Scholarship. He was then employed by the Sheep Husbandry Department at Massey for two years as required by the Wool Board Scholarship. He was then awarded the MacMillan Brown Agriculture Research Scholarship and a Fulbright Travel Grant to enable him to undertake a PhD at Michigan State University under Professor A M Pearson who has trained many international meat scientists. His thesis looked at the possibility of using potassium-40, a naturally occurring radioisotope, for predicting the meat content of live sheep lambs, their carcasses and minced meat. He was one of the first workers in this field to suggest the method was not likely to be a practical proposition in live farm animals where very long counting times would be required for accuracy, the equipment used was expensive and cheaper alternatives were available. The PhD was completed in 1962. Before leaving the USA, Alan was elected to membership of Sigma Xi, the PhD honorary fraternity.

He returned to NZ to the Ruakura Animal Research Station in 1963 where Dr L R Wallace had just taken over the directorship, and joined the Meat Group under Daintry Walker. He believed at that time that the Meat Industry, the largest export industry, used so little technology that there was tremendous scope for improvement.

In the past 30 years this situation has not changed greatly and is only now starting to show signs of improvement. When he began research at Ruakura the meat from rams and ram lambs was regarded as unacceptable as table meat. As a result of his work, ram lambs and short scrotum lambs with their faster growth rates and leaner meat are now fully acceptable to the meat industry and form a high proportion of early season lambs.

He documented that pre-slaughter fasting of lambs, calves and cattle before slaughter resulted in carcass weight losses, he helped document the effects of changes to lamb and beef carcass classification systems and influenced improvements to these systems - not yet to the extent of acceptance of objective systems. He showed that carcass shape (conformation) only had a very slight effect on meat yield and was largely influenced by fat cover. He helped document the meat yield of the progeny of most of the breeds of ram available in NZ which produced a massive database that early mainframe computers had difficulty in analysing the results. As the sheepmeat industry has started to show signs of improvement, he is gathering extensive information on the breed influence on the muscle cut content of the carcasses. He has been one of the few western scientists to undertake research on the meat from goats.

He has been a very productive scientist, to date contributing to just over 270 publications being senior author of almost 200 of these. He has produced 95 papers in refereed journals, 56 in the proceedings of scientific conferences, 29 in proceedings of extension conferences and 76 articles in the farming and meat industry press. In addition he has produced 9 technical reports and contributed to 9 book chapters. This research contribution has been recognised by the Research Medal of the NZ Association of Scientists (1972), a Fellowship of the NZ Institute of Agricultural Science (1975), a DSc from Massey University (1984) and a Fellowship from the Royal Society of NZ in 1991. In 1994 he was awarded an MBE for his services to Agriculture.

He has been a strong supporter of the NZ Society of Animal Production, having contributed to date to 38 papers in the conference proceedings. He served on the committee for 8 years including 3 years as secretary-treasurer. His Presidential address in 1975 resulted in a request from the Director-General of Agriculture for a copy within an hour of presentation. Public servants were not supposed to criticise other Divisions of the department and the address contained implied criticism of the Meat Division.

He has also served for several years on the local branch as well as Council of the NZ Institute of Agricultural Science, being national President in 1987-88. He also served several terms on the Council of the NZ Association of Scientists, being President 1969-1971 and 1991-93, giving publicity to the negative aspects of science restructuring as administered by FRST. Some of the criticisms of the NZ Association of Scientists in relation to the bidding and refereeing process as administered by FRST have resulted in changes and improvements to the system. He is currently on the Standing Committee of the Primary Production Committee of the Royal Society of New Zealand. For this work on behalf of scientists he was awarded the Marsden Medal of the NZ Association of Scientists in 1991.

With his many contributions to the Society of Animal Production, to agricultural science and to the environment in which scientists work, Dr Kirton would make a worthy recipient of life membership of this Society.

Allan J Pearson