

SIR ARTHUR WARD AWARD 2004

John William Penno BAgrSci (Hons), PhD

The Sir Arthur Ward Award recognises the successful application of scientific research or farmer experimentation through a series of trials or effective extension in New Zealand animal production. It is fitting therefore that the Society recognise Dr John Penno's contribution to the dairy industry during the last 14 years in his roles as consulting officer, applied scientist, General Manager of Extension, and recently as a large-scale dairy farmer and director of Dairy InSight. In all of these roles, John has communicated his knowledge and passion for the industry and has inspired farmers to make positive changes in their businesses. His method of communication is always challenging and persuasive, with a sense of the imperative. He is at his best explaining the principles of profitable dairying and the huge opportunities that lay before the New Zealand dairy industry.

His quick rapport with the farming community was first demonstrated as a consulting officer in Taranaki. Here he answered local questions with local research projects, many of which he instigated. Indeed, his first NZSAP appearance in 1993 relayed the results of one of these projects, comparing different nitrogen fertiliser programmes.

Not surprisingly, Arnold Bryant invited him to join the Dairying Research Corporation where he became leader of the Farm Systems group. Here, John was best known for his communication of the farm systems research conducted at No. 2 Dairy. The 1.75 t milksolids/ha project that John became responsible for created new production benchmarks for top farmers, and provided an understanding of the farm systems response to supplementary feeds. The effect of stage of lactation and season on response to supplements was further investigated in his PhD. This was followed by the Whole Farm Efficiency project that improved our understanding of the relationship between stocking rate and profitability. The legacy of this work can be seen in the more than 50 publications on dairy farm productivity, the common use and understanding amongst farmers of the farm systems response to supplementary feeds, and by the increasing use of Comparative Stocking Rate as an improved method for describing stocking rate. The Whole Farm Model



research programme that he initiated will also be seen as an important product of his time as a researcher.

John's science was a platform on which he challenged, encouraged, and persuaded dairy farmers to go after their farming business and lifestyle aspirations. John was a frequent and sought after presenter, and organiser, of discussion groups, field days, workshops, and national and international industry and science conferences. There is no better illustration of this than his involvement in the Ruakura Farmers' Conference. During the last ten years John presented 11 papers

at the conference, most of them as a keynote speaker. He was also principally responsible for redeveloping the conference format, in close dialogue with farmers, increasing attendance from 600 to 1450 people to make it the largest dairy farmer conference in the country, and possibly the world. He also had close involvement in organising and presenting at the South Island Dairy Event, Large Herds Conference, and the International Large Herds Conference (2000).

With the formation of Dexcel, an industry-good research, extension and education organisation, John became General Manager of Extension. Here he provided a vision of how a farmer-owned extension service should operate, and set about assembling the necessary people and forming the organisational structure required to make it happen. Importantly, John established specialised business and product developers to provide the industry with linkages between research, extension, education, and rural professionals. These initiatives will shape how dairy farmers receive information for years to come.

This award is as much about recognising the previous contribution John has made to the industry, as it is about our expectation of his future impact of the industry. As a developer of large-scale dairy farms, he is currently leading the industry by example. Reports in the farming press of the innovative farm development, layout, organisational structures, human resource management, and ambitious targets of the farms John is involved with continue to motivate others.

As a farmer director on the board of Dairy InSight, he is perhaps now in the best position to influence the research, development and extension that dairy farmers

have invested in. It is appropriate that John Penno join previous recipients of this award such as Colin Holmes, Clive Dalton, David Wallace, and Des Clayton for outstanding communication and application of scientific research to the dairy industry.

Eric Kolver and Chris Burke