

## SIR ARTHUR WARD AWARD

### David R. Stevens

The nomination of Dr David Stevens for the Sir Arthur Ward Award recognises the impact David has had on the sheep and deer industries in Otago and Southland, and more generally throughout New Zealand. This impact has been made through excellence in communicating to farmers the principles of maximising animal performance through supply of high quality feeds to meet key production targets.

David graduated from Lincoln University with a Bachelor of Agricultural Science with honours in 1982. He followed this with a Master of Applied Science completed in 1984 with research into crop agronomy. David then started his career at the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR) Gore Regional Station in 1984 where he evaluated and demonstrated the impacts of pasture renewal on farm systems. David and his colleagues were one of the early groups to use measurement of animal performance, such as lamb growth rates or hogget performance to evaluate the on-farm impacts of improved forage supply. During the late 1980s the Gore Regional Station was recording over 1,500 farmer contacts per year. This indicates the high value that farmers placed on the knowledge being generated and disseminated. During this time David was also instrumental in developing a focus farm program, based on identifying successful farmers and following them for one year to see what they did, when they did it and how they did it. This proved to be an excellent approach to learning within farm systems contexts. The program became a pre-cursor to the highly successful monitor farm series.

Following his time at Gore, David travelled to the USA in 1995 to do a Ph.D. in animal nutrition. On his return in 1998, David was located at the AgResearch Invermay campus where his work continued on researching and extending the impact of nutrition on animal performance and the farm system. He undertook a review of lamb growth for Meat and Wool New Zealand, which then became the basis for the "400 Plus" book on lamb growth rate. A series of farmer seminars on nutrition of the



ewe followed, where David distilled the science into practical targets for farmers to benchmark against to improve their ewe performance. David's work in deer has followed similar themes, where he has defined and updated seasonal feed requirements for young and adult deer of different genotypes, and researched the use of forage systems to achieve higher overall performance. This work now forms the basis for feed budgets and performance targets for many deer farmers.

David's impact on farmer learning and practice change has been a result of the attention he has given to two key areas. Distilling the key elements of research to form practical targets and guidelines for farmers, and understanding how people learn and designing ways to package information to best achieve a change in farmer practices.

David has always recognised that the farmer, as the decision maker, is the most important animal on any farm. In pursuing this approach David has always been willing to engage with social scientists to better understand the information requirements of farmers. This has led to a significant input into developing and delivering several highly successful learning packages, including the "Pasture quality" workshop for sheep and cattle. This workshop was subsequently adapted by David to focus on deer, and presented to deer farmers around New Zealand.

David's contribution to providing sound science-based advice to farmers in practical ways, always recognising the farm system context, has been invaluable to ensuring uptake and utilisation of knowledge resulting from the work of many practitioners and scientists. This excellence in communication has had a real impact on the success of pastoral industries throughout New Zealand but particularly in Otago and Southland. It is on these grounds that Dr David Stevens is a very worthy recipient of the Sir Arthur Ward Award.

*Jason Archer and Geoff Asher*