

LINCOLN UNIVERSITY CENTENNIAL AWARD

Peter H. Fleming

In 1978 the New Zealand Society of Animal Production instituted the Lincoln College Centennial Award. The Award is made to “a person who has made a substantial contribution to the College either by hosting student field trips and/or by providing practical work opportunities”. Historically the Lincoln College Centennial Award has been presented to farmers, but this year we nominate Peter Fleming who recently retired as Senior Lecturer in Farm Management at Lincoln University.



A consistent finding in surveys of past Lincoln students is that they greatly value interdisciplinary field trips and North Island tours. We as staff also greatly value these as they give us the opportunity to visit farms to reinforce lecture material on farm with the farmer’s input. These field trips and tours do not just happen, they take considerable organisation. Farms and farmers have to be identified and visited beforehand; programmes for the visit have to be worked out and times allocated to the various contributors, the logistics of moving at least 100 students has to be planned and other staff kept informed. For the longer tours, accommodation and provisions have to be arranged, buses to be booked and the list goes on.

From the year after his appointment in 1985 through until his retirement this year Peter Fleming took on this role of organising interdisciplinary field trips and the North Island tour for the second year combined BAgSc/BCom(Ag) group. Close to 2,000 students and many staff have benefitted from his organisational and planning skills. It might be construed that this was just part of Peter’s workload model, but it was the meticulous attention to detail in this organisation and his personal commitment to ensuring trips run smoothly that was above the call of duty.

Farm visits naturally involve question and answer sessions between either staff or student questioners and the farmers. Some field trips involve exercises by students on some aspect of the various production systems. For this to work, lists of questioners, grouping of students to work on particular problems have to be devised. Peter was just as organised on-farm with his initial questions to set the scene and on the important farm management issues. He never switched-off on these visits and was good at filling in the gaps if he thought something important had been missed.

Some of us might admit to being a mite frustrated, some would say exasperated, at times

with Peter’s very precise timelines. For an academic in front of a group of students in full voice about their pet topic, it is disconcerting to be told it is time to wind-up. However, that is the way it has to be if the objectives of the day are to be fairly met.

Despite Peter’s best planning there were incidences when things fell apart due to no fault of his. Like the day after the receivers were called in to Ansett Airlines Ltd. Peter had to try and contact 90 students to tell them

that they would not be flying to Wellington. Another incident was the “second night” that we spent at Flock House. The first evening meal was everything a Lincoln student on tour could expect in terms of both quantity and quality. There were competing interests for the Flock House caterers the next night and we were relegated to a draughty classroom and presented with two commercial sized cooking pots, one containing a low dry matter mince and the other, even lower dry matter mashed potatoes. This was as close to a mutiny on a field tour as it gets. Peter had to sort it out.

In 1994 Peter was appointed Chair of the University’s Field Trip and Travel Committee. As Chairman he was a champion of the retention of field trip days and tours as essential components of the curriculum. He also argued strongly that partial subsidising of these by the administration was essential if they were to survive. It is to his credit that he achieved this in difficult financial times.

On behalf of the myriad of Lincoln University students and staff whose exposure to farms around the country has been a memorable and educational experience, we thank Peter, for his organisation of, and contribution to these and we are pleased to be able to recognise this by his nomination for the 2009 Lincoln University Centennial Award.

Alastair Nicol and Derrick Moot