

LIFE MEMBER

Alastair M. Nicol

B.Sc. (Agric.), M.Agr.Sc., Ph.D.

Following completion of a B.Sc. degree in Agriculture at Glasgow University, Alastair Nicol was attracted to study for a Masters in Agricultural Science in New Zealand at the then Lincoln College with Professor Ian Coop. The opportunity was provided by the award of a Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland Postgraduate Scholarship.

His rapid grasp of New Zealand systems of livestock production and natural empathy with livestock farmers made him a natural candidate for a lectureship at Lincoln which he took up in 1968 and has held throughout his career. His initial role was to focus on beef cattle production. His early major contributions included work for the then New Zealand Meat Producers' Board on carcass grading issues, and research on leader-follower systems of grazing. His interests in energy metabolism and efficiency of nutrient utilization took him, in the late 1970s, to the University of Alberta, Canada, where he evaluated the implications for the energy metabolism of animals of consuming cold forages and completed a Ph.D. On his return his interests broadened from beef cattle to sheep and deer, but still centred on how to improve efficiency of farm systems by manipulation of the grazing management. His work on comparative diet selection and grazing complementarity of livestock species saw the development of novel approaches to understanding grazing behaviour and the plant preferences of grazing ruminants. His work on maternal size and efficiency in sheep has had a major impact on selection and management decisions of farmers and he has been in great demand by farmer groups to explain his work. His most recent diet selection work has opened up the possibility that selectivity in sheep varies between individual animals of the same breed and may well be an inherited trait. From this it is only a small step to the conclusion that specific genotypes within a breed may be better sward managers than others. More recently his work on welfare aspects of simple non-drug based methods of velvet antler removal has had the very practical objective of cost savings for farmers and typically, he has been prepared to fight established interests to ensure its application.

All this indicates his intense interest in the farmed situation and real improvements for



livestock producers. His contribution to farm discussion groups and breed societies has been legendary. He is still in great demand for these meetings because of his empathy for their situation. As a member of the New Zealand Society of Animal Production he has been the champion of the farmer membership and the vision that the Society and its Proceedings should be valuable to livestock farmers. It would be fair to say that his contribution and advocacy in this area has probably been at the expense of a more selfish personal ambition of scientific publication of his many original ideas for scientific peer review.

As well as this farmer advocacy he has served the Society and its objectives in many other ways; as a Management Committee member and, during 1991-92, as President; as Editor and prime mover of the most successful Occasional Publication of the Society "Number 10: Livestock Feeding on Pasture" and as co-editor and author of its successor "Number 14: Pasture Supplements for Grazing Animals". He was also a prime advocate of the very successful Young Member Award instigated by the Society during 1985. Throughout his career, he has been a strong mentor of students setting out on a research career as evidenced in his associate authorship of many papers with young scientists. The strength of the membership of the Society owes much to his assiduous and enthusiastic advocacy, encouragement and support of membership applications by young scientists.

This represents a lifetime of service which has helped immeasurably to keep the Society focussed on the relevance of engagement with the livestock industries for its future relevance and vitality.

We believe Life Membership of the Society is richly deserved.

Neville Jopson and Denis Elvidge