

SIR ARTHUR WARD AWARD

Julie Everett-Hincks

Julie Everett-Hincks has played an important part in science and extension for New Zealand farmers. Her research, and importantly, the extension of that research, has made a real contribution to improving lamb survival and appropriate management of triplet ewes.

Julie grew up on a South Otago sheep farm, where her interest in maternal behaviour of ewes and the potential to improve maternal behaviour through genetic selection began. She completed a B.Agr.Sc. (Hons) at Massey University in 1996, and then a Master of Applied Science with first class honours in Animal Genetics in 1997. This was followed by two years at Wools of New Zealand where one of her achievements was to get shearing and wool handling qualifications NZQA accredited. She returned to Massey University in 2000, where she completed a PhD investigating lamb-rearing performance in highly fecund sheep.

Julie then joined AgResearch Invermay, initially as a post-doctoral scientist with the reproduction team. She soon moved to the Animal Genomics team to lead projects relating to lamb survival. A series of projects over a ten-year period followed, with numerous funding organisations supporting the research, reflecting Julie's whole-system approach. The projects enjoyed support of more than 20 stake-holders, 22 sheep breeders, 47 flocks and involved at least 200,000 lamb post-mortems predominately carried out by the breeders. The project highlighted the value to farmers of identifying the causes of neo-natal lamb deaths, so that the relevant causes of death could then be addressed on individual farms. Julie became the face of lamb post-mortems in New Zealand, providing demonstrations and tuition to farmers nationwide in how to conduct and interpret post-mortem examinations on lambs. A lamb post-mortem DVD was produced to enable farmers to practically and simply diagnose the primary cause of lamb deaths. This research extended to investigate the management of triplet litters, and she has been a strong advocate for the use of body condition scoring as a tool to increase production.

Julie has given over 50 presentations to industry groups, where she has shared relevant, practical strategies to increase lamb survival. Many of these presentations have received follow-up media coverage in written form, and also through interviews on radio programmes.



In 2013, the lamb survival project was recognised as one of the AgResearch's three most influential projects, in terms of its impact in the New Zealand agricultural industry. Following on from this, it was used as a case study in a project on "Adoption and Practice Change" that investigated the "Principals of Success" of the influential projects. This investigation highlighted the approach that Julie took, demonstrating collaborative leadership at the farmer level as instrumental to the success of the project in delivering industry change. Quotes from

industry participants in the project were collected which highlighted this: "The project had the right people involved – communication style at farm level was very important here (No 'them' and 'us')"; "The project leader cares about people and forms good rapport and networks... so even though the farmers had to go out in the rain and do the work they would do it because of the link they had with the project leader."

Unsurprisingly, given her involvement and presence across the industry, Julie has been described as one of the most recognisable scientists in the farming sector, and is widely respected by sheep farmers in New Zealand (Dr Jock Allison, quoted in Otago Daily Times, May 2014).

A notable feature of Julie's approach has been her rapport with farmers. She has remained connected with farmers and agriculture, and understands the farm as a system. Her science is both robust and practically relevant. It is clear she has a real passion for adding value on sheep farms and she backs that passion up with a talent for the job.

Julie is now studying law at Otago University, where she retains her interest in and affinity for New Zealand's agricultural industry. Her breadth of knowledge of animal production will soon be supported by legal prowess, and she will no doubt expand her already impressive contribution to agriculture in New Zealand.

Rebecca Hickson and Tricia Johnson