

## McMEEKAN MEMORIAL AWARD

### Nicolas Lopez-Villalobos

BAgrSc, MAgrSc, PhD

Professor Nicolas Lopez-Villalobos has made, and continues to make, an outstanding contribution to animal production in New Zealand and to the New Zealand Society of Animal Production.

Recognised nationally and internationally as an expert in dairy cattle breeding, Nicolas's expertise includes design of selection and crossbreeding schemes for dairy cattle, devising milk-payment systems, simulation of dairy product processing, and genetic evaluation of dairy sheep and goats, and dogs. He is also extremely skilled in statistics, and provides advice and assistance in experimental design and data analysis to many scientists and students.

Originally from Mexico, Nicolas came to Massey University as a Masters student in the early 1990s and stayed on to do a PhD, which he completed in 1999. He was quickly employed at Massey University as a post-doctoral researcher, before progressing to a research officer, and then a lecturer in 2002. He steadily worked his way up the ranks, achieving the position of Professor of Dairy Cattle Breeding and Genetics in 2014. This career progression reflects the significant contribution he has made via his own research, collaborations with other scientists and students and expert supervision of many post-graduate students.

An A-rated researcher in the PBRF evaluation system, Nicolas has 203 peer-reviewed journal papers and a further 162 peer-reviewed conference papers. The conference tally includes 94 papers in the Proceedings of the New Zealand Society of Animal Production, making him one of the top five most-published authors in the Society in the past five years. His h-index is 21, and there are more than 1300 citations of his work.

Nicolas has made a substantial contribution to genetic evaluation of dairy cattle in New Zealand, including research on novel milk traits, breed comparisons and hybrid vigour, once-a-day milking, genotype-by-environment interactions, parent average and re-proof bias in young dairy bulls, economic value estimation and to develop mate selection tools, among many others. Dairy cattle simulation modelling approaches that he has co-developed are included in widely used decision support tools such



as Farmax Dairy Pro and Minda Weights. In addition to his contribution in New Zealand, he has also contributed to the dairy industry in Argentina, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, USA and Uruguay. His contribution to industry extends far beyond the dairy industry, however, and a scan of his publications reveals that he has contributed to a plethora of studies in a variety of subjects and species.

A particular strength of Nicolas as a scientist is the wonderful, supportive and expert supervision he provides to his many post-graduate students. In his 16 years as an academic staff member, he has supervised 74 post-graduate students. It is no

surprise that Nicolas was awarded a Massey University Medal for Research Supervision in 2015. He currently has six PhD and four masters students under his supervision. It is impressive to note when considering Nicolas's 94 papers published in NZSAP, that a large proportion of these feature a student as first author. Nicolas is one of the biggest supporters of student involvement in NZSAP, and this contribution to the Society is one that will have continued benefits to the Society for many years to come. In addition, Nicolas has past-PhD students working in important industry organisations in New Zealand and internationally, so his contribution to industry will extend well beyond his own career.

Nicolas has been recognised internationally for his expertise, and he holds awards from the National Council of Science and Technology of Mexico, the Cooperativa Tambara Nueva Alpina in Argentina. He has been an invited speaker at international conferences all over the world, and is currently on the continuing committee for the World Congress on Genetics Applied to Livestock Production, as well as being on the local organising committee for this conference when it was held in Auckland in 2018.

Nicolas is a quiet achiever in our society and hugely supportive to its young members. He is a very worthy recipient of the McMeekan award in 2018.

*Rebecca Hickson  
Jeremy Bryant*