

2015 NZSAP Living Legend Address – Invermay Agricultural Centre

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Some of the best science is done by those who are excited by their research and by working with industry. Many breakthroughs come from people noticing, and following up on, unusual observations or anomalies. Often, their passions are funded “from the back pocket” for several years; until sufficient information is secured to justify a formal funding application.

The Living Legend Lecture invites distinguished long-term members of NZSAP to make a scholarly presentation at the Society’s annual conference in recognition of their contribution to New Zealand Animal Production over a substantial period of time. Heeding the Guidelines recommendation to consider members resident in the area holding the conference, the 2015 organising committee chose to nominate the contributions of the scientists and technical staff of an iconic Institution, rather than acknowledge a single individual’s work. No specific animal production “theme” was selected. Instead, it was decided to highlight the contribution of the Invermay Agricultural Centre as a whole.

Invermay has a proud history of scientific discovery and has made a significant contribution to New Zealand Animal Production. There are around 300 contributions to the Society’s Proceedings where the senior author was associated with Invermay at the time of publication. Ten of the Society’s McMeekan Award recipients, and three Sir Arthur Ward Awardees, have worked or still work at Invermay.

This presentation will celebrate more than 65 years of scientific excellence. It is impossible to have contributions from every individual who has been a part of that record. By using a combination of narrative, personal presentations,

and short video contributions, the authors will briefly trace some highlights of the history of Invermay Research Centre, and its unique contribution to New Zealand Pastoral Agriculture.

Originally purchased by the Government in 1946, Invermay was scheduled for development and subdivision into four farms for returned servicemen. Following extended negotiations, the land was transferred to the Department of Agriculture in July 1949 to become a research farm; and so began the legend.

Invermay was established to address the problems associated with farming in Otago and Southland. Much of the initial work provided answers to questions around soil fertility and pasture establishment in order to tap the considerable potential available by developing marginal country. Some of the most significant early contributions related to fertilisers and trace elements; especially molybdenum’s contribution to efficient farm production.

As the property developed, the emphasis shifted towards all grass farming on quality pasture. With this came a need to increase reproductive rates, improve nutrition, improve meat and wool quality, introduce new farmed species, and improve selection indices for productive and animal health traits in order to increase rates of genetic gain. In more recent times, Invermay pioneered the use of technologies which are now *de rigueur* for improving animal production.

Invermay is poised to shift its emphasis in order to answer new questions that are being posed by a new set of problems associated with animal production in Otago and Southland. It is fitting therefore, to reflect on, and acknowledge, the successes so far.