

## HONORARY LIFE MEMBERSHIP

### John C McEwan

BSc (Hons) FRSNZ

John Colin McEwan spent his youth working on the family, and other local, farms during school and university holidays. After graduating from Otago University, he spent a short time as a High School maths and science relief teacher and purchased a farmlet where he ran a small ewe flock.

Late in 1977, John was hired as a temporary worker at Woodlands Research Station. Within a year he was employed permanently as a technician. By 1981, he had been promoted to Scientist and was Officer in Charge; running his own research programme, supervising trials for scientists based off-site, and managing four technicians, the farm manager and his staff.

It was during this time that John recognised the value of liaison and extension. His acknowledgement of the input of breeders, and his ability to involve them in leading the industry, underpins John's personal contribution to New Zealand sheep breeding.

In 1986 after a year's secondment in Ireland, John transferred to Invermay, where his research interests soon gravitated towards genetics and parasites.

John played a key role in establishing a national performance recording database for the New Zealand sheep industry, which became Sheep Improvement Ltd (SIL). Not only did John design SIL's genetic engine, he also wrote much of the original computer code. With a background in biochemistry and physiology, but little formal tertiary education in mathematics, statistics or computing, the robustness of his initial work, from an entirely self-taught knowledge of computing and programming, is astounding.

Once the SIL genetic engine was running, John set about upskilling himself again, and established what has become a world-recognised Bioinformatics group based at Invermay.

John McEwan's contribution to the New Zealand sheep industry is far-reaching. As well as being involved in developing the parasite resistance and carcass modules in SIL, he was instrumental in setting up the SIL ACE genetic evaluations and the Central Progeny Test. John also pioneered the concept of genomic selection in New Zealand sheep. More recently, John has directed his efforts towards using both host and rumen biome genetics to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions from ruminants.

His trade-mark is meticulous data checking, debugging of recording errors and production of user friendly reporting.



Through an extensive network of international links, John McEwan has made significant contributions to genetics and genomics in cattle, sheep and aquaculture industries around the world. He is also a major contributor to the development and use of genotyping-by-sequencing methods which enable genomic analysis in many plant and animal species, both domestically and abroad.

John has provided genetic consultation to a variety of sheep breeding groups within New Zealand. Arguably, his most significant contribution has been encouraging (perhaps more accurately insisting on) the sire linkage that is key to genetic improvement in the NZ sheep industry.

John has also made a significant contribution to the affairs of this Society, particularly in relation to putting the work of the Society 'out there'. He has held management roles and is currently listed as an author on 57 papers published in the Society's proceedings. Significantly, John has mentored, encouraged and introduced to the Society several of the next generation of scientists who will carry it forward.

John McEwan is always 'at work'. Many are those who can attest to receiving email correspondence with a time-stamp indicating that it was sent while lesser mortals slept. John has mentored Masterate and PhD students, and post-doctoral fellows. He has also found time to amass a prodigious personal international publishing record. While John demands a significant level of input from his staff, those who work for, and with, him are fiercely loyal, have total respect and hold him in the highest regard.

Throughout a long career, via his focus on improving the New Zealand sheep industry, his work ethic, his breadth of knowledge, his foresight in championing new technologies, his prodigious output and his generous imparting of these traits to those he has mentored, John McEwan has made a unique and significant contribution to this Society and to New Zealand animal production in general.

It is without hesitation therefore, that we nominate John Colin McEwan for Life Membership of the New Zealand Society of Animal Production.

*Grant Shackell  
Patricia Johnson  
Neville Jopson*