

LINCOLN COLLEGE CENTENNIAL AWARD 1986

N.J. Cook

This award of the New Zealand Society of Animal Production is presented each year at the Farmers Conference to a farmer who has made a notable contribution to Lincoln College either by hosting student field trips with a livestock emphasis or by involvement in student farm practical work.

The recipient of the award for 1986 is Nelson J. Cook of Kowhitirangi, West Coast.

Nelson Cook and Lincoln College first became associated in the early 1970s when B.Com.Ag. and Dip.FM. students toured to the West Coast. The major purpose of these class visits to Nelson Cook's property was to investigate the production achievements and management practices that made him one of the top dairy farmers in the South Island. During the 1970s dairy farming conditions on the West Coast were the closest to those in the Waikato and Taranaki available to Lincoln College without actually having to go there. The College's association with Nelson continued until 1982-83 when field tours were switched to the Nelson-Marlborough area.

Historical records show that Nelson took over the management and ownership of the family farm in the late 1950s at the tender age of 20 years. At that stage total production from the unit was in the order of 13500 kg milkfat/annum.

From that time onwards bush blocks were purchased and developed at different stages. By 1976 the first bush block, purchased in 1970, had been fully established as a dairy unit. At this stage Nelson was milking 225 cows and producing 35000 kg milkfat/annum on the 2 units. Further land was purchased in 1978 and 2 further farm units were established—one to become a dry stock unit for growing out replacement stock for the milking herd and the sale of surplus stock, the other—another bush block—to be brought into production as a further milking unit in 1982-83.

Today Nelson has 4 farms, 3 milking and 1 dry stock unit carrying a total of 425 cows and producing a total of 72000 kg milkfat/annum. On these units Nelson has been able to give 2 sharemilkers and his eldest son opportunities to involve themselves in day to day dairy farm management.

His performance levels both on a per cow and a per ha basis have been achieved through good, efficient cow management and husbandry and an understanding of good grassland management. In all these areas, his performance levels are well in excess of Westland District averages. At present the 2 longer-established units are producing 300 kg MF/ha and 190 kg MF/cow (100 kg, ha and 60 kg/cow above the district average) at an above district average stocking rate. On

the new block, in just its third milking season, production levels are already at the district average. These production figures equate very favourably with Waikato figures of 400 kg milkfat/ha and 158 kg milkfat/cow, allowing for the harsher spring environment and the higher Waikato stocking rate.

There was a twofold objective of student visits to Nelson Cook's property. The first was to study the management and husbandry which enables him to consistently produce at these high levels. A notable feature to the student of animal management has been the way in which Nelson established target body weight and monitored the body weight gain of his young stock—a decade in advance of the now well established practice. Secondly, to study the planning involved with land development—the integration of physical and financial planning towards development of highly productive pastures and well grown young stock.

Further, the students were encouraged to discuss aspects of Nelson's labour management and in particular how the "mini discussion group" conducted with his farm staff and sharemilkers operated as a means of informing and involving them in the overall management.

Nelson Cook is a worthy recipient of the Lincoln College Centennial Award. Strengths he possesses and the example he demonstrated to several hundred College students include:

- his ability to think clearly and to communicate his ideas to students and staff alike. A particular example remembered by one of the staff members visiting with the students was Nelson Cook's questions and challenges about the relevance of the Dairy Board Sire Selection Scheme and the lack of foresight in not including temperament and conformation aspects of the cow;
- the foresight he has shown in his land development work;
- his questioning mind and the confidence he has brought to bear in challenging new ideas and the way he has investigated these. For example, he would run half paddock trials for fertiliser application etc;
- the excellence of his stock records.

These abilities have been previously recognised, in 1976 by the presentation of the A.C. Cameron Award and in 1980, when he received the Grasslands Association Dairy Farm award.

Nelson's abilities are not just confined to the farm; he has been a local body County Councillor since 1980, Chairman of the Westland Veterinary Club

since 1976, and is past President of the Westland A & P Show, and of the local Young Farmers Club. He is currently a Council member of the Friesian Breed Society.

As Nelson would tell you, behind every successful man is a woman—in his case his wife Jan. Together

they have put together the notable achievements in dairy farm production and management and land development which was the prime objective of Lincoln College student visits.

It is for these achievements that Nelson Cook has been awarded the Lincoln College Centennial Award.