OBITUARY

WILLIAM (BILL) FRANCIS LEONARD

Bill Leonard was a past president of the New Zealand Weed and Pest Control Society and was elected a Life Member of the New Zealand Plant Protection Society in 1987. He was an author of a number of papers published in the Society’s Proceedings. He was an agricultural scientist, being involved in a wide range of research, from weed and pest control to intestinal parasites of sheep and cattle. One of his most notable achievements was being instrumental in the development of minimum tillage.

Bill graduated from Lincoln University with a Bachelor of Science degree in 1948. The following year he joined the Department of Agriculture, working in Marlborough and Canterbury. Much of his early work was associated with weed control but he also published work on control of insect pests, indicating his broad agricultural experience. Bill’s work with nassella tussock in the northern South Island led to methods of control using the herbicide 2,2 DPA.

In 1965 Bill joined ICI New Zealand to continue his research on minimum tillage, the direct drilling of seed into pasture or crop fields after spraying to remove existing vegetation. He established three teams of researchers throughout New Zealand to investigate the practice of minimum tillage under different soil types, climates and crop types. Bill also worked with machinery manufacturers to refine the technology of introducing the seed to the sprayed ground.

Other pioneering work that Bill was involved in included the control of weeds in waterways and the use of helicopter spraying to control gorse. In addition, he worked with the veterinary team to develop one of the first broad-spectrum anthelmintics, levamisole, for the control of internal parasites.

Bill Leonard held a number of leadership positions in the agricultural industry, with considerable involvement with Agcarm (New Zealand Association for Animal Health and Crop Protection) and the New Zealand Chemical Industry Council. Bill had a major input into development of the legislation that is now the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms (HSNO) Act. He was also a technical editor for the New Zealand Agrichemical manual and a co-author of Agcarm’s accreditation manual. Between 1988 and 1998 Bill established an environmental consultancy that supplied advice to a large number of companies and organisations. During that time he was also a member of the technical task group of the Ministry for the Environment that considered management of pesticides, and was on a panel that developed criteria for registration of animal remedies.

Bill was a member of the Royal Society of New Zealand and a foundation Member of the New Zealand Institute of Agricultural Science. In 1997 he was presented with the “Leading Professional Scientist” award from the New Zealand and Australian Institutes of Agricultural Science.

Adapted from an obituary written by Felix O’Sullivan