

2001 Donald Medal report

Moree farmer and researcher awarded agronomy's top honour



Mr Esdale accepting the Donald Medal from Kirsten Bacon

Mr Jeffrey Esdale, who recently retired as Managing Director of Livingstone Farms at Moree, was awarded this year's C.M Donald Medal for his contribution to the development of sustainable production systems in agriculture in Australia.

Kirsten Bacon, a grand-daughter of Prof. Donald, presented the medal to Mr Esdale at the Agronomy Conference in Hobart.

Mr Esdale graduated from the University of Sydney in 1960 and then spent seven years as a research agronomist with the NSW Department of Agriculture. In 1967 he became farm manager at the University of Sydney's Plant Breeding Institute at Narrabri and, in 1976, Manager of the university-owned Livingstone Farm at Moree.

Livingstone Farm was left to the university on the condition that it demonstrated the economic value of conservation farming techniques to the agricultural industry.

In an entertaining presentation to the conference, Mr Esdale described how he set about re-organising the farm around a no-tillage system, including the use of a 'secret weapon' (sheep) for weed control.

"They are the best weed sensors around and have a big impact on herbicide resistance – there aren't many weed resistant sheep," Mr Esdale said in one of the many colourful anecdotes with which he punctuated his lecture.

He urged agriculturalists to "take their blinkers off" and use the services of aeronautical and mechanical engineers to assist with better machinery design. His interest in this subject was evident in the collection of slides on seeders he presented to the conference with an analysis on the benefits and drawbacks of each and how it had been used on Livingstone Farm.

In summary, Mr Esdale said he envisaged a future where no-tillage systems will dominate most of our broad scale farming operations and that no-tillage will be combined with a diversity of cropping and livestock production enterprises.

He paid homage to his peers and to the farmers, consultants and researchers from universities, government departments of agriculture, research centres and CSIRO whose "brains he had picked" during his career.



Jeff Esdale and colleagues Frank Crofts and Reg French