

Lincoln University

Dr Michael Nelson, BAgSc, MAgSc (Hons), PhD

Lincoln Alumni International Medal

2014

Lincoln University has had a long and varied association with the countries of Latin America, a linkage which sparkles with the contributions and achievements of generations of graduates – Kiwi and Latin American.

Among the Kiwi Lincoln University graduates is Dr Michael Nelson, originally from Havelock North and now of Wanaka, who dedicated a 45-year career to rural development and natural resources work in Latin America.

Michael graduated Bachelor of Agricultural Science in 1951, Master of Agricultural Science (Hons) in Agricultural Economics in 1953 and was subsequently awarded a Fulbright Scholarship, which took him to the United States of America where he completed a PhD in Agricultural Economics at Oregon State University. His dissertation at Oregon won the American Farm Economics Association Award for best PhD thesis in 1957.

From 1957 to 1988 Michael worked as an economist, senior economist and programme director in several organisations including Stanford Research Institute in the US, Honduras and Argentina, Resources for the Future in Chile, Ford Foundation in Mexico and the World Bank in Washington DC. For six years he headed the Division of Natural Resources at the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America in Chile.

From 1988 until his return to New Zealand in 2007 Michael worked on a voluntary basis for the Centre for Environmental Research and Planning in Santiago, Chile. In addition, as an independent consultant, he worked on environmental issues for various international agencies, primarily the World Bank, in Latin America and South-East Asia.

Much of his early work was centred on the search for solutions to rural poverty and underemployment in tropical regions of Latin America. His studies of colonisation settlements on tropical forest lands exposed the fallacies of many so-called 'solutions' to poverty, which were costly in terms of money and lives.

Back in New Zealand and living in Wanaka, Michael was elected vice-chair of the Central Otago-Lakes branch of the Forest and Bird Protection Society in 2010 and has been an active participant in the branch's activities related to the management of the high country.

As Dr Arthur Domike, President of the Esquel Group Foundation and Faculty Fellow at the American University School of International Service, Washington DC, says: *"There are very few, if any, New Zealanders who can match Michael Nelson's record for dedicated service to economic development and reduction of poverty in Latin America"*.

Dr Michael Nelson is therefore a worthy recipient of the 2014 Lincoln Alumni International Medal.