

## Scientists of AgResearch, University of Otago to work together

Scientific teams from AgResearch, the largest Crown Research Institute in New Zealand and the University of Otago, the first university of New Zealand will soon come together under one roof, in the new Center for Reproduction and Genomics (CRG) at AgResearch's Invermay campus near Dunedin.

The purpose-built building, which will be known as the Christie building (named after AgResearch's former chairman, Mr Rick Christie) is to be the heart of research into reproduction and genomics, with a focus on livestock and human reproduction, health and disease and mammalian reproductive control.

Scientists and administration staff from AgResearch's Reproductive Biology and Animal Genomics Sections are housed in the new building. Currently the Genomics Section's Molecular Biology Unit is based at the University of Otago and together with university scientists working in the field of Reproduction and Genomics, they are all now relocating to the CRG.

The Director of the Centre is Prof Neil Gemmell, who earlier this year has been appointed to the AgResearch Chair in Reproduction and Genomics at the University of Otago. Prof Gemmell says the scope for the new center is very broad and its strength firmly based on existing collaborations. "New Zealand is undoubtedly a world leader in the fields of animal health and breeding and genomic technology. I think we can build on that, and take information from decades of work in livestock and translate it into other areas of animal and human health," he says.

He says the Center will provide a hub and forum for scientists to find new ways to utilise the knowledge emerging from major genomic initiatives. "We want to enhance animal and human health and reproduction, create new wealth and industry and sustain our environment. We also want to generate new knowledge and train people who are capable of utilizing that knowledge."

Dr Jimmy Suttie, General Manager, Science & Technology, AgResearch says with a growing awareness of environmental sustainability, while at the same time having to provide products for expanding global markets, New Zealand is facing a major challenge. "We need to increase our productivity in terms of value rather than volume," he says.

"Our pastoral industry will be required to perform at a higher level but at lower cost – and that is where the Centre for Reproduction and Genomics will play a most important role. To a large extent successful farming practices will depend on the selection of elite animals by observing phenotype and the use of a variety of genetic tools, as well as gaining more understanding of animal reproductive systems." Dr Suttie says ultimately the science that will be done at the CRG will also be translated into human health.

Animal Genomics Section Manager, Dr Theresa Wilson, agrees saying the New Zealand pastoral sector is in an ideal position for the uptake of new genomic technologies. "We face great challenges in continuing to produce high quality products that meet the needs of our export markets while at the same time juggling the growing calls for sustainability, addressing climate change and animal welfare."