



News Release

June 21 – for immediate release

Inaugural innovation award highlights community benefits flowing from irrigation

Irrigation NZ's inaugural innovation award has unveiled a large number of innovative irrigation projects delivering positive environmental, social and economic benefits to wider communities.

Presented in conjunction with principle sponsor WaterForce the award aimed to celebrate, encourage and promote innovation and the positive benefits being realised in communities with, and as a result of, irrigation.

Prompted by a need to highlight the good news about irrigation and to acknowledge irrigators striving to be efficient and caring for the environment the inaugural award has proven to be its own winner.

INZ business manager Chris Coughlan said the level of interest was extremely satisfying with the entry numbers reflecting the keen interest in the aims of the award.

The huge interest attracted from a wide range of innovative projects clearly demonstrates the industry's very mindful thought for environmental benefit as it strives to align irrigated agriculture with optimal water management to ensure New Zealand's economic future.

The inaugural award was proudly sponsored by WaterForce. Paul Donaldson of WaterForce said it was exciting to be associated with Irrigation NZ and the innovation award as innovation fits right with the ethos of WaterForce.

"Kiwis are innovative, particularly in the agricultural sector and WaterForce is striving to promote optimisation of New Zealand's water resources and deliver solutions within the irrigation industry. This is a strong Kiwi award, for Kiwis, and WaterForce has a very close connection with that," Donaldson said.

Stu Bradbury of Precision Irrigation emerged from the strong field of finalists to take out the 2010 award with a variable rate control irrigation system for centre pivot and linear move irrigators that give total control of where water is applied beneath the irrigator – technology

that will be a way of the future in irrigation as farmers and the industry move to ensure optimal water management nationwide.

With remote programming and monitoring through the easy to use software interface and an advanced system controlling every sprinkler on the irrigator, water is applied at varying rates only where necessary. Water and pumping costs are saved and the irrigator runs to maximum efficiency.

Feilding-based Precision Irrigation began developing the VRI system in 2006. The system went through various stages of design and testing until the first prototype was installed on a dairy farm in 2008 with the aim being to keep water off the cow tracks. Since then 12 VRI systems have been installed nationally.

The mapping software runs on farm PC and takes many forms of a farm map including maps drawn from GPS, aerial photography of Google Earth. The irrigator's specifications are loaded into the mapping software and then the areas are drawn on the map and programmed for how much water they are to receive. A programme is then generated and loaded into the VRI controller on the irrigator with the irrigator using GPS to determine its position and using a wireless network of control nodes turns on, off, or pulses valves individually for every sprinkler.

More than 3000 pivot and lateral sprinkler systems have been installed in NZ since 1997, irrigating an area of about 300,000ha and Bradbury believes 30-50% of these centre pivot irrigators could be retrofitted with VRI to provide immediate economic benefit to the farmer with potential water and power savings estimated to be 10-20% using VRI to address the variable soil types.

Precision Irrigation (a division of WMC Technology Limited) had taken the concept of VRI and produced a package that can be fitted at installation or retrofitted to any existing centre-pivot or linear irrigator. They are supplying VRI systems to irrigation installers and plan to continue the development of the VRI system while providing support to existing customers.

A modest Bradbury was a man of few words after winning the award. "It's all pretty interesting stuff and a progressive part of the industry to be working in," he said.

As far as Bradbury is aware there is no one else in the world offering such a system and while New Zealand is the priority, patents in Australia and the US have also been applied for.

Bradbury's winning effort earned him a cash prize of \$2,500, sponsored by WaterForce and the honour of being the inaugural winner of this prestigious innovation award.

Highly commended awards were presented to Kirk Irrigation for K-Line irrigation and Cross Tech Engineering using water turbines to enhance pumping costs for spray irrigation.

The other seven finalists were: The Ashburton Lyndhurst Irrigation Scheme for piped pressurised water delivery; the Ritso Society for irrigation scheme sustainability; Rangitata Holdings (Eric and Maxine Watson, Ashburton) for VRI precision irrigation; Pivot Tech-Plateau Works for pivot irrigation; Landcare Research (Carolyn Hedley) for precision irrigation scheduling; TracMap for GPS placement of pod irrigation and Opuha Water Ltd for the Opuha Dam project.

For full information on the innovation award go to:
<http://www.irrigationnz.co.nz/events/innovation-in-irrigation-award/>

**** Poster pdf files and further detail of all 10 finalists are available upon request**

***** Photo of the winner Stu Bradbury also available**

For photos/and or finalist poster pdfs – contact Annette Scott: annettescott@xtra.co.nz

Further comment on the award and its winner and finalists:

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Irrigation NZ

Irrigation NZ is a national body representing all irrigation interests in a unified voice to promote excellence in irrigation development and efficient water management based on the principles of responsible and sustainable water management throughout New Zealand.