

APPS Honorary Member

Dr Ron Close



Ron Close began work in 1953 as a plant pathologist in the Plant Quarantine Section of the New Zealand Department of Agriculture, where he was employed for 4 years. In 1957 he transferred to Crop Research Division of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR) to work as part of the New Zealand potato breeding programme, particularly developing cultivars resistant to viruses. His research also included studies of aphid vectors of viruses and control of *Potato leaf roll virus*. From 1960 to 1962 he carried out postgraduate study at Rothamsted Experimental Station, Harpenden, UK. In 1965 he transferred to the Plant Diseases Division, DSIR at Lincoln. His research during this time included studies of diseases of potato, cereals, pea, and lucerne, focusing particularly on methods for controlling crop diseases in the southern regions of New Zealand, where arable cropping is a particularly important component of primary production. During this period he was Officer-in-Charge of the Lincoln, Canterbury, Substation of Plant Diseases Division.

Dr Close was a foundation member of APPS, and became actively involved in Society affairs from the outset. He was President of the Society from 1976 to 1978, and during that time he and others organised a workshop at Lincoln on “Epidemiology and Crop-Loss Assessment” In 1995 he chaired the Organising Committee of the 10th APPS conference at Lincoln.

In 1973 Ron transferred to Lincoln College (later Lincoln University) as a Senior Lecturer. In 1978 he was promoted to Reader in Plant Pathology at the University. He was involved in undergraduate teaching of courses in plant protection and plant pathology. He also supervised Honours, Masterate and PhD students, working on projects related to plant pathology and plant protection, and acted as external examiner for numerous PhD studies at New Zealand and Australian universities

Ron’s research contributions have involved a broad spectrum of crops and pathogens, and have been communicated across the full breadth of knowledge transfer activities. He has been heavily involved in industry field days and seminars, and local media (radio and newspaper), to provide growers with information on identification and management of important yield- and quality-limiting crop diseases. He has presented numerous papers at local and international conferences, and has

published many papers in New Zealand and international science journals. His most notable research achievements include:

- Initiation of research on aphid flight patterns in the Canterbury region;
- Development of effective control of Potato leaf roll virus using granular insecticides applied at crop establishment;
- Development of methods for control of Barley yellow dwarf virus in cereals;
- Development of effective control of eyespot of wheat and barley;
- Detection of bacterial wilt of lucerne in Canterbury;
- Studies of bacterial blight of peas and development of effective control strategies;
- With other scientists he contributed to a major paper on the aerial dispersal of biological material from Australia to New Zealand;
- Characterisation of virus pathogens of peas and their transmission by aphid vectors;
- With postgraduate students, added to basic knowledge on Aphanomyces root rot of pea, Septoria leaf spots of wheat, Beet western yellows virus in Brassicas and other plants, and rust diseases of barley and wheat, particularly in studies of disease epidemiology and methods for effective disease management.

Dr Close retired from Lincoln University in 1994. In retirement, he has continued active work in plant pathology as a consultant in PlantWise Services. He was Treasurer of APPS from 2003-2005. He was heavily involved in the organisation of the 8th International Congress of Plant Pathology in Christchurch in 2003, which incorporated the 14th Biennial Australasian Plant Pathology Conference. The financial success of the Congress (under Ron's guidance) gave very considerable benefit to APPS, and continues to provide assistance to South Island members of the Society, particularly for international travel.