

Recipient of the 2023 IETS Distinguished Service Award: Sudharma (Sue) Leelawardana

Early career in Sri Lanka

Dr Sudharma (Sue) Leelawardana was born in Sri Lanka, where she completed her veterinary degree from the University of Peradeniya. She commenced her veterinary career as a government veterinarian in the Sri Lankan Department of Animal Production and Health. It was a mixed bag of veterinary work, which included veterinary care for production and pet animals, as well as implementing animal sector government policy (specifically in animal reproduction and nutrition). Her work was based in rural Sri Lanka. Working in this environment helped Sue to realise the importance of animal reproduction to improve the local livestock breeds, which had to survive and reproduce on low-quality animal feed available to rural farmers.

In 1984, Sue married her husband, Don, who was also a veterinarian.

A big move to Australia

In 1988, Sue completed a Master of Science degree, sponsored by the Food and Agriculture Organization, at the Asian Institute of Technology in Bangkok, Thailand. On her return to Sri Lanka, she undertook the role of adviser to policy makers. In this role she continued her work to improve the native cattle breeds through selective reproduction.

In December 1988, Sue and her husband moved to Australia on a skilled migration program. Soon after that Sue had her only child Suellan in Perth, Western Australia. While caring for the baby she successfully undertook the daunting process of getting her veterinary qualifications recognised in Australia. This helped her commence her career as a veterinarian in Australia in the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) in 1996. During her time with AQIS, she completed her membership in the Australian and New Zealand College of Veterinary Scientists (ANZCVS) in 1998. Recently she was made a 'life member' of ANZCVS.



Specialisation in animal health risk analysis

Over the years, Sue developed an interest in Animal Health and Food Safety Risk Analysis and, in 2000, completed her training at the Royal Veterinary and Agriculture University in Copenhagen, Denmark, in qualitative risk analysis (animal health and food safety).

In 2001, Sue and the family moved to the Canberra head office of the Australian Department of Agriculture and Water Resources. This is where Sue became heavily involved in animal health risk assessments, particularly import risk assessments of animal reproduction material. In 2003, she gained competency in quantitative risk analysis for animal health and food safety in France under Dr David Vose. Soon after that Sue completed a Post Graduate Program in Veterinary Epidemiology and Public Health at Royal Veterinary College of London.

Further work in reproduction with International Embryo Technology Society (IETS), and a move to New Zealand

Sue's risk assessment work with the Australian Department of Agriculture and Water Resources paved the way for the importation of bovine *in vitro* embryos into Australia, from the USA and Canada. During this process she, along with two other counterparts, visited US and Canadian embryo collection and production facilities. She, at the time, attended her first ever IETS conference and Health and Safety Advisory Committee (HASAC) meeting in 2016 in Kentucky.

Sue also helped reopen the Australian market for the exportation of semen and *in vivo* embryos to USA and Canada via negotiating animal health conditions for Australian ruminant reproductive material and opened new markets for these products from Australia to various countries including South America and the EU.

During this time, she started attending the HASAC Committee meetings and the IETS conferences in the USA annually. In 2017, she joined the Ministry of Primary Industries in New Zealand as the Manager of the Animal Risk Assessment team. Although she did not attend the Conference in Thailand in 2017, she took over the duties of Dr Francis Fieni as the Chair of the IETS Manual Subcommittee in 2018.

A happy retirement in Australia

Sue moved back to Australia in November 2022 due to family commitments. She is now retired and lives with her husband in Melbourne, Australia. She has continued to work on the IETS manual with various specialists in the embryo technology area to update the fifth edition of the IETS manual. She hopes to continue her work in veterinary epidemiology, qualitative and quantitative animal health and food safety risk assessments and reproduction in the future.