

**ROLSTON: MAURICE PHILIP, Dr**  
Known as Phil

**Born: 27 February 1949, Otaki, New Zealand**

**Married: 5 June 1971, Auckland, New Zealand**

**To: Shirley Muir (1949 – present)**

**Honours**

**1996: Chinese Friendship Medal**

**2005: The NZ Institute of Agriculture & Horticulture  
Technology Transfer Award**

**2008: Foundation for Arable Research (FAR)  
Researcher of the Year**

**2015: International Science and Technology  
Co-operation Award**

**2017: Kea Award for a World Class New Zealander**

**2019: Chinese Government's Most Prestigious Award  
for contributions to Agriculture in China**

***Phil's parents were:***

William James Maurice (b. Levin 11 Nov 1923 – d. 1 May 2007)  
and  
Lorna May (nee Whitaker) (b. Levin 10 Jul 1926 – d. 15 Nov 2015)

***He has one brother & two sisters:***

Annette Mary (1950 –)	married David Banham
Stephen William (1952 –)	married Erin Crawford
Jennifer Lorna (1956 –)	married Perry Johnson

***Philip and Shirley have five children:***

Gregory (Greg) (Apr 1974 – Nov 2020)
Ian (Oct 1977 – )
Fergus (Oct 1980 – )
Fiona (Nov 1983 – )
Hazel (Apr 1987 – )

Phil Rolston heads the fourth generation of the Rolston family in the Horowhenua district.

- 1) Phil's great-grandfather Samuel Rolston left Portadown, County Armagh, in Ireland in 1870. He lived for three decades in Australia before emigrating on to New Zealand in 1900. He bought land and settled at Ihakara, between Levin and Shannon.
- 2) Samuel had a son, Richard, who arrived here with his parents at the age of 14. He would become Phil's grandfather. He bought land to farm on Kawi Road near Lake Horowhenua.
- 3) Richard had a son, William James Maurice (known as Maurice). He would become Phil's father. Returning from World War II, Maurice bought some of his dad's land for his own dairy farm. This fronted onto Lindsay Road.
- 4) This Lindsay Road farm is where Phil grew up with his younger brother and sisters. One 2.4-hectare block of this farm is still in the family – Phil's sister Annette lives and runs stock there.

On his mother's side, Phil's great-grandfather and grandfather (Whitaker) arrived in Levin from Queensland, Australia, in 1904. They were builders, and examples of houses and business premises they built in Queen Street still stand today.

But to concentrate on Phil, he was born in Otaki in Feb 1949 as there were no maternity services in Levin at that time. He was educated at Levin North Primary school and then Horowhenua College (1963 – 67). He concentrated on science subjects and maths, and had the honour of being Head Boy in 1967.

Maurice (his father) had been a foundation pupil of Horowhenua College in 1940 (and so too was his mother, Lorna!). But more significant in Phil's life was the inspiration of his father as an innovative farmer. Having returned from serving in World War II too old to join the Young Farmers organisation, Maurice had the idea of forming a 'discussion group' with similarly aged local farmers in similar circumstances. The group numbered about 12 and included other well-known farming family names like Easton, Wright and Horne. They met every month, rotating around each other's properties, sharing ideas and the solving of their issues. It was the first such discussion group in New Zealand. A Dairy Board consulting officer attended at times and before long the Board adopted it as a model to be replicated around the country.

Phil's passion for farming inevitably stemmed from his father's example, and he went on to Massey University in 1968 to start an Agricultural Science degree, specialising in agronomy (the study of crops and the soils in which they grow). He finished his Bachelor's in 1972, and his Master's degree in 1974, also from Massey.

Next followed a scholarship funded by the National Research Advisory Committee to enable him to embark on a doctorate. This was conditional on his working for a government department for 18 months first. He joined the DSIR (Department of Scientific and Industrial Research) in Palmerston North and when his 18 months were up, he headed away to Oregon State University in the

USA to begin his post-graduate studies. His thesis was on seed production in red and white clover.

On completing this, in 1978, he was bonded for a further year back in New Zealand. He returned to Palmerston and the DSIR, whose Grassland Director, Dr Ray Brougham, had been working on a project in China. This would become the critical link to forging Phil's own career-long association with farm development in that vast, developing country.

His first trip to China was in 1983, to the southwest province of Guizhou, where a group of New Zealanders, including Ray Brougham, were contracted by the Chinese government to establish a model farm at Dushan to grow seed.

Over time he has become an internationally recognised expert in forage seed production, grassland farming systems, pastoral agronomy and soil research. He has helped to improve grass and clover seed yields not only in New Zealand and China but altogether in 20 countries across Central Asia and South America.

He has been actively involved in 30 research and development projects on grassland and livestock production in China, instrumental in introducing New Zealand style grassland farming systems and techniques to western regions there.

While working with Lanzhou University, the Guizhou Agriculture Commission and other organisations, Phil has helped develop forage seed scientific research, improve soil fertility through plant selection, pasture establishment and management. He has been involved in training significant numbers of Chinese technical staff to enhance their research capabilities, all of which have boosted the region's economic performance.

Back in 1983, he witnessed pitiful levels of poverty. While pockets still exist, the transition from a basic to a highly modern economy, transport and communications structure has amazed him.

Over 30 years and 60 visits later, he received a very distinguished award. In 2015 he was one of seven people to receive the International Science and Technology Co-operation Award. Fewer than 100 scientists have received this honour.

The ceremony in the Great Hall of the People was attended by more than 3,000 people including President Xi Jinping, Vice premier Li Keqiang and other leading officials.

"The award is the equivalent to receiving a knighthood in a foreign country", stated the Science & Innovation Counsellor at the New Zealand Embassy in Beijing.

In 2017 he was one of the eight people recognised in the "Kea World Class New Zealand Awards". These awards recognise world-leading Kiwis whose inspiring achievements are defining New Zealand's image internationally. The key point of difference of these awards is the celebration of global success, often from Kiwis

who have achieved outstanding, and, in many cases, world-changing success offshore.

From 2005 until 2017, he was vice-President and President of the International Herbage Seed Group, representing seed researchers and seed agronomists from around the world.

After more than 40 years working for AgResearch and its predecessors, Phil retired, technically, but in reality, joined the Foundation for Arable Research (FAR), continuing to work with seed growers. At age 72 he confesses to still being on an 85%-time contract. He holds an honorary role as lead scientist at AgResearch and an Adjunct Professorship at Lincoln University, where he still does some teaching. He and Shirley live within 30 minutes' drive of the Lincoln campus, at TaiTapu in the Selwyn district.

Because of the coronavirus pandemic, Phil hasn't been back to China since October 2019, but still has a couple of projects there on hold – one working with the seed production team at Lanzhou University and the other a poverty alleviation project near the Burmese border. While he can't travel, there's a little more time to be with his 9 grandchildren and to watch their sports activities.