



## Brendon Gill

# Waitoa scientist appointed to board of AOAC

Fonterra dairy scientist Brendon Gill has been appointed to the Official Methods Board of AOAC International, a globally recognized standards organisation founded in 1884.

AOAC consists of approximately 3,000 international scientists, and there are 12 to 13 on the board. Brendon is one of this elite group. It is a prestigious appointment and he is the only New Zealander to be given this honour.

When analytical needs arise within an industry, AOAC is the association for finding appropriate science-based solutions through the development of microbiological and chemical standards. AOAC standards are used globally to promote trade and to facilitate public health and safety.

Brendon is a scientist with an extremely complex job description, and a very specialised area of expertise.

However, he never set out to be a scientist when he finished his schooling at St John's College in Hamilton.

He had several jobs including three years as a labourer, cleaning the wooden bins that milk powder are shipped overseas in, but in his mid-20s he had a lightbulb moment.

"I'd had enough," he said. "I knew what I didn't want to do for the rest of my life."

He enrolled at Waikato University and fell in love with science. Supporting himself with student loans, and part time work, he earned a Bachelor of Science in 1998, and a Master of Science with honours in 2000.

Starting off his married life, he called it quits on study, and started as a technician at Fonterra's Waitoa laboratory, which is where routine tests of formula and other products are carried out.

Over time, an opportunity arose to work alongside Waitoa's only research scientist, Harvey Indyk.

This was a great opportunity which led to Brendon becoming the second scientist employed at Waitoa.

Fonterra then funded Brendon while he studied for his PhD in chemistry, which he completed in 2013.

Brendon now works as a Senior Research Scientist in the Nutritionals Laboratory at Waitoa, where he is responsible for the development of analytical test methods for micronutrients in infant formula.

To page 2



Fonterra scientist Brendon Gill holds one of the most scientifically specialised positions in the world.

# The Redeemed Motorcycle Ministry are spreading the word



The loud roar of several powerful motorbikes announced the arrival of a bike gang in Morrinsville last Saturday evening. Although most were in full leathers, with the familiar large round patch on their back, this is not an ordinary bikie gang.

Led by chairman George Short, the Redeemed Motorcycle Ministry is a group of Christian men and women motorcycle riders, whose aim is the bring the Kingdom of God to earth.

Brought to town to speak at the Baptist Church by local organisation

Te Manawa Ora, they support the work of local community groups and service organisations.

Their goal is to encourage youth to avoid drugs and alcohol, and to put their faith in Christ.

It is the hope of The Redeemed that their new life in Christ will be a positive role model to the youth of today who face great challenges.

Many members of The Redeemed come from difficult and disadvantaged

To page 3

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**Morrinsville RSA bingo**  
Tuesday Nights, 7pm.

**Senior Citizens Club social day**  
1st Tuesday of each month,  
1.30pm at the Senior Citizens  
Hall.

**Piako Toastmasters Club**  
2nd and 4th Wednesday each  
month.

**Te Punga Floral & Garden  
Club**  
4th Wednesday of each  
month. Contact Lois Ritchie  
07 889 1677.

**Ladies daytime social netball**  
Thursdays 12pm-1pm.

**English classes for migrants  
and refugees**  
Morrinsville Community House,  
Mondays 10am to 12 pm (except  
for school holidays.)

## Contact Us

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# A Kiwi scientist on the world stage

From page 1

Micronutrients are small molecules such as vitamins present in very low concentrations in formula, but they have a very high impact on infant health.

When formula from Fonterra is exported, it ends up at the border of the recipient country, where it is tested to ensure it meets their standards.

If the importing country uses a completely different test to the one used by Fonterra, they could come up with a different result, possibly leading to the product being rejected at the border.

"The lab at Waitoa has the latest equipment, and exceptional staff, and competes at a high level internationally," says Brendon.

"The Waitoa laboratory employs highly talented people, and most of my workmates have degrees."

He has been conferred two of AOAC's most prestigious awards: the Method of the Year award and the Technical Service of the Year award in 2017.

In addition, the vitamin D project he led was a finalist in the New Zealand Business Innovation Awards.

He regularly publishes the results of his research in highly regarded scientific journals.

Brendon says there is a lot of scientific research happening to improve infant nutrition.

In the future it will become possible to fine-tune infant formulas to the degree that different formulations will be fed at different times of the day.

This will mimic breast milk, which changes in composition. "Breast milk is not a constant," says Brendon. "It changes in composition, not only within a 24-hour period, but also during the period of lactation."

There are also dramatic changes in the future – robotics and automation are in their infancy right now, but there are huge transformations happening in this field.

Many of the steps in the laboratory are routine and laborious. Automation can take over some of these tasks, but there will always be a need for chemists to analyse the information.

"Instruments will always give a number," said Brendon. "But we need capable people to evaluate that number."

As part of his position on the Official Methods Board, Brendon travels overseas to meet with the other

members at least six monthly.

They set the parameters as to what a method needs to accomplish, and based on the data from laboratories around the world the best methods become the benchmark for testing.

Two methods Brendon has designed are now being used as global reference methods and recommended for use by Codex Alimentarius (a body set up by the United Nations.)

He explains that first and foremost is the health and safety of infants. Milk is mostly fat, protein, lactose, and water, with added micronutrients playing a critical role in growth and development.

"Infant formula is a food unlike anything else," says Brendon. "It is the sole source of nutrition for the child for several months, so we need to be totally sure there is not a problem with it. There is very little margin for error."

Brendon is passionate about his work and he is an example of Kiwis in surprising places who are punching above their weight on a world stage.

The fact that one of the most scientifically specialised positions in the world is held by a New Zealander who works at Waitoa is proof that a person can do anything if they are determined enough.

When not at work, Brendon relaxes with his hobbies of cryptography (the art of writing and solving codes)

playing chess and poker, and solving logic puzzles. He also enjoys the outdoors lifestyle and has been a Scout leader.



Scientist Brendon Gill at work in the Fonterra laboratory with research scientist Harvey Indyk (left.)

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