

OLD AGGIES

President: Frank Doughty, (02) 9481 8787, fdoughty@tpg.com.au
 Secretary: Graham Linnegar, (02) 9527 1830, helgra@linnegarplumbing.com.au
 Treasurer/Membership: Colin Short, (02) 9876 1018, cbshort@bigpond.com

Alstonville luncheon

16th September 2024, Cherry Street Sports Club. Contact Geoff Jacobs 0412 107 727 or gajacobs@bigpond.com

Armidale/Tamworth luncheon

9th April 2024, Bendemeer Hotel – contact Dr Barbara Vanselow 0434 344992 or bvanselo@gmail.com

Gosford luncheon

7th November 2024. Venue TBA. Contact Geoff Warr (02) 4342 3226 or 0411128 936 or warries509@gmail.com

Orange luncheon

9th October 2024, Best Western Ambassador Motel. Contact Len Banks 0428459117 or banks@lmbanks.com.au

Wagga Wagga luncheon

16th May 2024, contact James Hamilton 0447 225 875 or jnch1950_1@bigpond.com

Subscriptions \$10 per annum now due

Subs can be paid by direct deposit into the Commonwealth Bank BSB 06-2263, Account No 00903542, Account Name Agricultural Retired Officers Association (please add your surname) or by cheque to Colin Short, 27 Chesterfield Road, Epping NSW 2121 or pay at your local luncheon.

From The Presidents Desk

At the 2024 AGM the following were elected; Dr Frank Doughty (President), Graham Linnegar (Secretary), Col Short (Treasurer/Membership) and John Bowler (Newsletter Editor)

Would you believe another name change for the Department! The Premier and Minister Moriarty announced that the Department will become the *Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development* on 1st July 2024. The new Department's focus will be to protect, support and develop our primary industries, mining sector and regions.

Steve Orr, Secretary of Department of Regional NSW says "To support the new direction for the Department and deliver the Government and Minister's priorities we are realigning our executive structure"

My special thanks to Lawrie Lucas-Smith for his work over the years as our auditor as he retires due to ill health. On behalf of Old Aggies I wish him the best.

Regional lunches have greatly strengthened Old Aggies so my thanks and best wishes go to the local organisers for successful gatherings in 2024.

Dr Frank Doughty
President

Old Aggies Luncheons

There is no doubt that Covid has changed many things in our society. One thing that I have noticed that it has had the effect of increasing the isolation of many people, particularly the older retired members of our communities. We have learned to live with Covid with people being more aware of social distancing, vigilance in personal hygiene, keeping vaccinations up to date and being more responsible in not going out when unwell.

Our reunion luncheons did suffer in the early phases of the pandemic but are now gearing up providing that important contact with our old workmates and staff members that made the old Department of Agriculture such an important part of our working lives and careers. It has been often said that the Department was a big family, sometimes a bit too intrusive but usually caring and concerned for staff members and their families.

I was privileged to attend the Wagga luncheon back in May and enjoyed meeting up with so many with whom I worked, or those people who were known by their names and achievements over the years. We do owe our thanks to those organisers who have kept our contacts going and their efforts in arranging the luncheons.

Col Short has again organised a luncheon in Sydney for Tuesday 13 August at Club Sydney (formerly City of Sydney RSL), 565 George St at 11.30 Cost \$35.00 per head. With the light rail down George St it is easy to get to without much walking for those less mobile than we used to be. It is hard to realise that it is 34 years since the Department relocated to Orange and there is no longer the staff with direct contacts but there is a large number of Old Aggies who do live in the area with good rail access so I

would urge you to make the effort to get out of your isolation and catch up with friends and colleagues. Please fill in the attached acceptance notice and forward to Col along with details of your payment by 7 August.

Len Banks has also arranged for Steve Orr, the Secretary of the new Department of Regional NSW (which embraces the old Department of Agriculture/Primary Industries) to attend the Orange Luncheon and talk on the new Departmental structure and responsibilities. Some of you may remember Steve from his role as Executive Officer for the State Council of the Rural Lands Protection Board. The Orange luncheon is on 9 October at Best Western Ambassador Motel Bathurst Rd Orange. Cost \$ 45.00 RSVP by 30 September.

The contact details for all the luncheon organisers are at the side. Please keep in touch with them and keep the information flow going. In particular the contact details of any newly retired staff would be most valuable as well as the inevitable death notices and obituaries.

Kings Birthday Honour: Dr Francis Richard Doughty OAM

It is a great pleasure to advise that Dr Frank Doughty was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in this months Kings Birthday honours list.



Dr Francis Richard Doughty OAM from Cherrybrook for services to veterinary science and the community.

Frank graduated from University of Sydney in Veterinary Science (BVSc) in 1962 and gained his PhD in 1973 from the same University for his studies on cancer (neurofibroma) in cattle. He worked with the NSW Agricultural Department in the field and in its veterinary laboratories for over 40 years becoming Director Animal Quarantine Services in 1983. This appointment saw him travel to many parts of the

world ensuring the safe import of thoroughbred horses and stud cattle from their home country and then through quarantine in Australia. He has been the Veterinary Representative for State Disaster Plan New South Wales Agricultural and Animal Services and is a life member of the Australian Veterinary Association. Frank has been President of the Castle Hill and Hills District Agricultural Society since 2016 and Honorary Veterinary Surgeon since 2013. His involvement with the Castle Hill Show spans more than 60 years, first as a member of the Epping Junior Farmers and later showing Jersey cattle. Frank has also been a tour coordinator with the Naval Historical Society of Australia since 2010, Life Member of Castle Hill Apex and a Justice of the Peace since 1962 providing a weekly JP service in Pennant Hills Library since 2008. Frank has been Santa at local Nursing Homes for over 15 years as well as bus driving for residents outings.

Peter Millington OAM

Peter Millington was also awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for his services to water conservation in NSW. Peter is well known to many Aggies through his various roles in the Department of Water Resources and its predecessor the Department of Land and Water Conservation

The new Secretary of the Department of Regional New South Wales, Steve Orr distributed the following staff circular

As announced by the Premier and Minister Moriarty in April this year, we will become the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development on Monday 1 July. The new Department's focus will be to **protect, support and develop** our primary industries, mining sector, and regions. To support the new direction for the Department and deliver on the Government and our Ministers' priorities, we are realigning our executive structure.

We are grouping closely aligned functions where it makes sense to do so, and we are also focused on building strategic policy capability informed by strong data and evidence. Some areas of the Department will experience some shifts, while others will have little or no change at all:

- **Local Land Services, NSW Public Works, Soil Conservation Service and Regional Growth**
- **NSW Development Corporation** will continue without change.
- **Mining, Exploration and Geoscience** will be renamed NSW Resources and will assume direct responsibility for the Future Jobs and Investment

Authorities team, maintaining a strong connection to Regional Development.

- **Fisheries and Forestry and Agriculture and Biosecurity** teams will operate under the leadership of 2 new Deputy Secretaries. Naturally, these teams will continue to work closely together and across the Department. Employees will align under these 2 areas on Monday 1 July, details were distributed by Sean Sloan, acting DPI Director General to staff on Thursday 6 June.
- **Regional Development and Regional Precincts** Groups will be brought together to form the Regional Development and Delivery Group. This builds on the move of Regional Coordination to the centre of Government within the Premier's Department from Monday 1 July.
- The **Strategy, Policy and Evidence branch in Regional Development** will be renamed Policy, Reform and Evidence and will report directly to me. To further bolster our policy capabilities, the existing **Intelligence Data and Evidence team in Corporate and Performance** will join this branch.
- **Corporate and Performance** will be known as Enabling Services and will be led by a Chief Operating Officer. Legal and Governance will move into the Enabling Services Group, and a new Grants, Lending and Data Integrity branch established. This branch will include the Rural Assistance Authority, Contracting, Grants Management and Compliance, and Regional Programs and Evaluation (both from Regional Development).
- **The Office of the Secretary** will be renamed Strategy, Media and Ministerial Services to better reflect the role of this team. The team will be responsible for coordinating key strategic initiatives, as well as the Department's media and Ministerial support. The Regional Development Trust will join the team during its initial investment phase before returning to Regional Development and Delivery.

Executive leadership updates

The implementation of this new executive structure will also mean some changes to our Executive Leadership team.

Sean Sloan will be taking on the role of Deputy Secretary, Fisheries and Forestry, effective Monday 1 July. Sean has significant experience in fisheries and aquaculture management. He holds a Bachelor's in Fisheries and a Graduate Diploma from the Australian Institute of Company Directors. His career includes significant roles in South Australia's Department of Primary Industries and Resources, the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency, and the NSW Department of

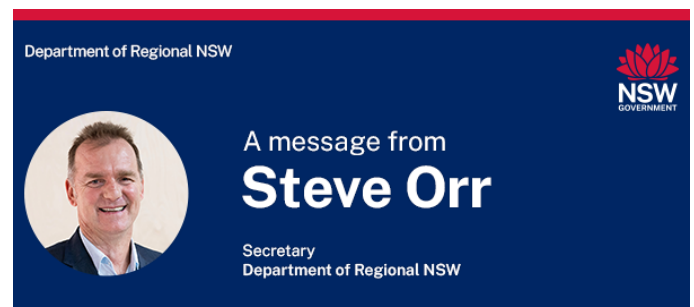
Primary Industries and has been acting in the Director General role since January.

Rachel Connell will be taking on the role of Deputy Secretary, Agriculture and Biosecurity, effective Monday 5 August. Rachel holds a Bachelor's (Hons) LLB from UNSW and a Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice. Her career includes significant roles such as Head of Division, Water at the Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment, and Executive Director of Regional Water Strategy at the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, where she led major reforms and improved stakeholder engagement. Rachel is very familiar with DPI, between 2015-2018 she was the Deputy Director General, Strategy and Policy division and Deputy Director General, Forestry division; it is that experience and the memories of working with passionate people that led her to apply for the role.

What do these changes mean for you?

The changes are realignments at the executive level and there will be no job losses below executive level due to these changes. While some employees will report to a different executive leader, most will retain the same reporting lines.

I look forward to working with you on implementing these changes and at the same time getting on with the job of delivering to our communities.



Old Aggies NW Branch

Barbara Vanselow reports on the luncheon on Tuesday 9th April at the Bendemeer Hotel

A lovely Autumn day at Bendemeer. great company, and a delicious lunch. By the amount of talking, everyone appeared to enjoy the get-together with 11 attendees.

Apologies from : Phil Chaseling (away), Graeme Mitchell (living in Brisbane) Peter Speers (other commitments), David Godden (living in Canberra), Jeff Esdaile, Daphne Johnson (other commitment), Bob Gaden (living in North Mackay Qld) Warren McDonald, Lester McCormick (other commitment), John Hosking (working), Alan Bell (family

commitment), and Bob Gahan (fighting serious illness and in our thoughts)



Left to right - Bill Johns, Barbara Vanselow, Graham Crocker, Mick Duncan, John Ayres, Bruce Terrill, Rod Browne, Gus Shaw, John Black, Hutton Oddy and Bryan Johnston.

I anticipate we will continue having our annual Branch luncheons. It is a chance to catch up with colleagues and other Old Aggies who worked in different locations and different fields. There is always a lot of discussion about our “work life” but now being Retirees we have so much else in common. Chatter over the years has revolved around post-retirement activities, travel, family, lockdowns, COVID and other health problems. The Old Aggies Newsletter is also such an interesting publication, providing an historical record of NSW Agriculture/DPI and many individuals. The Old Aggies Committee decided that anyone who wants to join or rejoin Old Aggies just needs to pay \$10 for 2024 as per previous email.

Report on Wagga Wagga Agricultural Institute - May 2024

WWAI is maintaining staffing levels at around 109 currently. Co-investment from the Research and Development Corporations is still strong across the range of programs.

The labs have had major investment and a name change to the **DPI AgEnviro Labs**.

As industry leaders, the DPI AgEnviro Labs are established as reference laboratories for the plant, livestock and olive industries, providing accredited testing techniques, systems and technologies. Accredited by the National Association of Testing Authorities (NATA), the laboratories provide independent, quality assured data to assist primary producers to improve the sustainability of their natural resources.

Feed Quality Service

The Feed Quality Service is the only laboratory in Australia which integrates research and commercial feed testing. Testing for parameters such as dry or organic matter, digestibility, crude protein, fibre, metabolisable energy, fat, ammonia and nitrogen content or pH levels of feed samples, the laboratory provides nutritional analysis of silage, mixed feed, total mixed rations, hay, pasture, grain, concentrates and forages utilising near infrared (NIR) and wet chemistry analyses.

Knowing the quality of feed or fodder can optimise the health and production of livestock and assist in accurately budgeting feed requirements and ensuring livestock management decisions are made with confidence.

Integrated with DPI’s world-leading researchers, the laboratory has access to fistulated cattle for advanced *in vitro* experiments for digestibility and methane potential of animal feed. Annually the lab analyses around 14,000 samples.

Oil Testing Service

The Oil Testing Service is qualified to classify Extra Virgin Olive Oil (EVOO) and virgin olive oil status, against the International Olive Council (IOC) standard and the Australian Standard AS5264-2011, and determine if products meet export standards.

Edible oils, olive fruit and oilseeds are unique products, with the quality influenced by a diverse range of factors including variety, fruit/oilseed maturity, harvest time, processing technology, grove/crop management, climate and storage conditions.

Understanding the chemical profile of edible oils, olive fruit or oilseeds determines the quality of the product, whilst olive oils that undergo organoleptic (sensory) assessment ensures the oil meets the extra virgin olive oil (EVOO) standard requirements set by industry bodies.

I am sure many of your members would have fond memories of the initiation of the labs over many years.

NSW DPI remains the Biosecurity support for industry across NSW. The Varroa mite outbreak highlights the important work DPI does from the initial emergency control part through to the research and then into the industry support which covers all areas of DPI. The Varroa mite response is now at the delivering ‘Train the Trainer’ sessions for NSW contract trainers and the newly appointed Varroa Development Officers who will continue to support NSW Apiarists. Other biosecurity threats include Fall Army Worm which is making its way southward from Qld and Brown Marmorated Stink Bug found at Port Botany but after 12 weeks of surveillance there has been no other detections.

Deb Slinger, Director WWAI

Vale Colin McKenzie Died 16 March 2024

Although it is some 35 years since Col retired many of us remember Col as a very effective Staff Clerk and later in his role as Senior Clerk in the Division of Research Services. Col was a very approachable and positive mentor and guide in the administration of Research Station Managers and Clerks under Ken Hutton as Chief.

Col was aged 95 years and spent his last years in a Nursing Home at Toongabie after living at Woy Woy on the Central Coast.

Vale John Crosby (Bing) 8/8/1937 – 22/3/2024

John Started his career with the Department as an Agronomist in the southern irrigation region before branching out into private industry with DHA Fertilizers. After a few years he rejoined the Department then served as Managers at Trangie, Condobolin and last at Tamworth. John was a very cheerful guy and very positive and methodical in his administration. He retired in Tamworth, being very involved in Rotary, particularly in Rotary Youth programs and the as District Governor. John suffered from Parkinsons Disease and he and Ann moved to Caloundra to be closer to the family.

Vale Reginald Whitby Died 13/3/2024

Reg started with the Department as a Stock Attendant at Trangie ARS, progressing to Field Assistant, before being appointed to Tamworth ARS as Foreman.

Vale Roger Southwood Died 2/5/2024 Outstanding contribution to Agriculture

Robert Freebairn

Roger Southwood, in my view and those of my many colleagues, was one of Australia's leading research agronomists, as well as a leader, who led by example that brought out the best in all those that were associated with him.

Roger passed away, aged 92, in May this year. He was a NSW DPI research agronomist and leader from the 1960s at Temora and then Wagga Wagga. For the last decade of his DPI days he was Dubbo based Western Director.

Many research and extension programs were initiated and led by Roger, with perhaps the most notable being his drive to ensure farmers and agronomists understood the ramifications of soil acidity and how to best address this massive issue. Up till the 1970s most of us did not appreciate the potential problem that slowly increasing soil acidity posed, especially on soils that in their natural state were to a degree acidic.

Roger Southwood stressed the need for urgent research and extension to address soil acidity. Commonly when a new complex issue is raised, especially if big dollars are involved, there is a tendency to avoid facing the problem. Roger Southwood was not one to let complacency rule and hence largely via his efforts followed a major acidity research and extension program that successfully addressed it, in its many facets.

I was fortunate to commence my career as an agronomist, working with Roger at Temora. One of his projects, back in 1966, (he had a large range of trials going on at any given time), was evaluating tropical grasses. His head office agronomy leaders of that era considered these trials inappropriate and told him to plough them out. Yet years later this research, under Roger's encouragement, in the central and north west, via district agronomists, led to a major shift in pasture type for thousands of farmers.

Roger Southwood's Temora dual purpose winter crop research pioneered use of nitrogen in these crops and steered sowing rates for slopes and plains environments to increase seeding rates from the then norm of 40 kg/ha to 60 kg/ha. Professor Frank Crofts, (Sydney University), had established that 90 kg/ha was best for the tablelands. Both these findings remain largely relevant today.

Pasture variety improvement was a major area of his research. Up to the late 1960s sub clover had largely failed to persist in western areas. Roger identified early maturing hard seeded varieties, initially Geraldton, followed later by Nungarin and Dalkeith that performed and persisted in these lower rainfall areas. He also first showed newer Phalaris varieties, (Siroso and Sirocco), developed by Rex Oram (CSIRO) could persist if carefully managed in environments like Temora.

A lot of pasture nutrition and management research was undertaken in the 1960s - 1980s. Roger was in the thick of these studies and led and or advised on many of them. Phosphorus and sulphur, and sometimes trace elements were main deficiencies. Research in following years showed similar deficiencies in central and northern NSW. Grazing management studies showed that for species like sub clover, rotational grazing was not critical for production but maintenance of groundcover was important.

Roger Southwood's leadership as Regional Director was outstanding. Retired Dubbo District Agronomist, commented recently that "his support for his officers was exceptional as was his support for our research

and extension programs. His agronomy background gave him a greater insight and understanding of our work”.

Typical of this support was the role he played in the release of several new pasture varieties. For example the release of Avila and Elgara serradella, both vastly superior to then main variety Pitman. Also Dalkeith sub clover release was influenced by Roger’s Australia wide respect and knowledge of how to get “things done”.

Roger’s influence extended across all farming aspects. He played a pivotal role in research seeking improved farming systems that led to change from cereals only to rotations including canola and pulses. He received the NSW Public Service Award in 1991, a rare honour. Like many outstanding Australians he was also involved in many community activities other than his work. A great man of Australian agriculture.



Roger Southwood

Vale Angie Gallagher 14/6/1951- 31/5/2024

Angie had a lifelong passion for the rural industries and worked in various government or quasi government roles. She was employed in the Regional Veterinary Laboratory at Wagga in the early 1980’s before moving to Severn Hills as a Meat Inspector, then moving to Gundagai in the Rural Lands Board as Footrot Inspector. After retirement Angie move to Ocean Grove near Geelong in 2000 and committed herself to the National Wool Museum in Geelong.

Vale Ted Scarlett 19/01/1942 – 29/05/2024

Ian Simpson and Dick Kerrins provided the following notes

A student at Wagga Agricultural Collage 1960 -1962, Ted came from Berridale in the Monaro country of southern NSW. On completing the Diploma in Agriculture course, he joined NSW Agriculture as a Sheep & Wool Officer and was located at Leeton for a training period. He later completed the Rural Extension course at Hawkesbury Agricultural College. Appointed District S&W Officer Moree in the late 1960’s, Ted later transferred to Albury where he spent the remainder of his career advising on livestock handling & management.

Ted had a fascination for methods that would assist in agricultural production. His ‘sheepo’ colleagues good-naturedly referred to him as “*Inspector Gadget*” for his seemingly endless supply of ideas & high-tech gadgets as solutions to livestock issues.

He eventually took on the role of NSW Coordinator of ecto-parasite control and promoted Lice eradication groups to reduce chemical dependence by eradicating sheep lice on a whole of district basis.

In his later year’s he undertook Small Ruminant Consulting to landholders in southern NSW & NE Victoria.



Ted Scarlett, John Sykes and Graeme Mitchell. Photo credit – Border Mail 10th August 2013

The NSW Department and the Rice Industry

Laurie Lewin

The NSW Department of Agriculture (under its many different names) was intimately associated with the development, expansion and success of the NSW rice industry from the beginning of the 20th Century until recent times. It was the dominant provider of the research, development and extension services that saw the industry develop into a major regional employer in the Murray and Murrumbidgee Valleys and a successful export industry, generating more than \$1 billion in sales of value added product. The Riverina industry often achieves world best yields and is regarded as a water efficient industry by world standards.

The NSW Department association with rice started with faltering steps to produce the crop in NSW, beginning with aborted attempts in the Northern Rivers and in the fledgling Murrumbidgee region at Yanco. An aristocrat of Japanese heritage attempted rice production near Swan Hill in Victoria from 1907 and provided some seed to the Department at Yanco in 1914/15. These experiments were largely unsuccessful but paved the way later successful trials. The manager of the Leeton Cannery (Jack Brady), on a trip to California noticed the similarity of conditions between the rice area there and the Murrumbidgee region. He arranged for the purchase of 3 varieties of rice from that area. Early experiments with these varieties by the Department at Yanco and on a farm near Leeton were so successful that the industry developed rapidly from that time. The work of Department agronomist, Austin Shepherd and Yanco farm manager John L Green in developing the appropriate cultivation techniques and in conveying these to fledgling growers certainly paved the way for the industry to expand.

The appointment of Walter Poggendorff to Yanco to improve pure seed production was an important step in the development of the industry. He was able to eradicate red rice (an important problem in most rice producing areas) and provide a steady supply of pure seed. He also recognised the benefit of improving the cultivars and was responsible for the development of Caloro II – selected from one of the Californian varieties. It, and an earlier maturing selection (Early Caloro) became to backbone of the industry for many years. He also initiated the introduction of improved varieties from other countries, and these laid the foundation for the later breeding program.

Expansion of the Industry

World War II saw the need for expanded rice production and this promoted rice growing in the Murray Valley. Once again it was the Department's

extension agronomists that provided the expert assistance to the fledgling rice growers.

The later development of the Coleambally Irrigation Area further expanded rice production. Agronomists such as Don Wallen, Warwick Clampett, John Sykes and Don McCaffery provided the expertise that allowed the expansion of rice growing in the area. Initially rice was only to be grown for 7 years to allow farms to become established. This was later relaxed to allow production under strictly controlled conditions.

Agronomic Developments

Early agronomy research centred on mechanical weed control, management of irrigation and fertilizer strategies.

The fertilizer strategies were further developed, particularly after the appointment of Ed Boerema as research agronomist. He promoted the importance of nitrogen just before permanent flood and did essential work on nitrogen timing. This was further enhanced by the soil chemistry work of Ron Polhill, Michael Horth and Peter Bacon, Damien Heenan and Graeme Batten who refined the nitrogen timing strategies and the need for other nutrients.

A particularly important development was the mid-season NIR nitrogen test, initially developed by Tony Blakeney and Dr. Graeme Batten. This was later incorporated into the MaNage Rice decision support system by Rob Williams and Dr John Angus (from CSIRO). This work has been further enhanced by Brian Dunn in his efforts to incorporate remote sensing into the test.

Aerial seeding was developed in the 1950's in a cooperative effort by farmers, aerial operators and Dr Don McDonald. This gradually became the most dominant seeding method in the industry for many years and was particularly important on the heavy sodic soils in the Murray Valley.

Land forming was also facilitated by many in the Department. Nearly all rice areas are now land-formed and early work on design, management and use of the technique were a result of the cooperation between farmers, and the research and extension officers of the Department.

The development of chemical weed control provided a major advance. The first chemicals were used from the 1960's with important development work by officers such as Ed Boerema, David Swain, Bruce Cox and Don Pollock. Further development work was fostered by private agronomist Malcolm Taylor who took over this research after the Department withdrew from this field.

Variety and Grain Quality Development

The industry was, for many years, based on the three short-grained varieties introduced from California. New selections, better adapted to local conditions

were made available after the appointment of Walter Poggendorff. A breeding program at Yanco was re-established after Don McDonald was appointed to Yanco in the early 1950's. Calrose, a medium grained variety was introduced from California and an improved selection released in 1956. The was more widely adapted and more cold-tolerant than the Caloro varieties and quickly became established as the mainstay of the industry.

A succession of varieties with improved yield potential, earlier maturity and greater adaptability were released from the program over the years with the development of semi-dwarf varieties being particularly important in increasing yield potential. The industry expanded and became more reliant on exports, and they needed to produce new types of rice to meet important markets. The first of these was 'Kulu' a soft cooking long grained variety released by Don McDonald in 1967. It quickly established a prominence in the Hong Kong market and forged new markets at home. This paved the way for improved long grain types and now there are varieties that meet specific markets such as firmer long grains, fragrant, arborio, bold medium grain and short grain 'sushi' types.

It was recognised that grain quality was important in maintaining the reputation of Australia as a producer of high quality rice. Initially this focussed on the importance of suncracking in determining milling quality and the work of Don McDonald paved the way for the development of aerated drying systems in NSW and dramatically improved milling quality in the industry. The appointment of Tony Blakeney as cereal chemist at Yanco led to the Department's rice quality research to be recognised worldwide and the close association of the breeding and grain quality teams was important in the development of varieties matched to the market. He was followed as cereal chemist by Melissa Fitzgerald who continued this important work and later became the leader of the cereal chemistry research at the International Rice Research Institute.

Other important contributions to varieties were provided by Dr Laurie Lewin and Dr Russell Reinke (who later moved to an important position with IRRI). These contributions saw increased yields, greater diversity in available varieties and better water productivity.

More recent plant breeding by Peter Snell has seen the release of varieties with improved cold tolerance. This will be important in underpinning the stability of rice production and minimise the troughs in commercial yield associated with cold during the January/ February reproductive period.

Extension

The dedication of the Department's extension officers was a very important factor in the development of the

industry. The many dedicated extension officers were instrumental in improving the ability of the rice producer to accept new technology and raise the yields over many years. The development of RiceCheck led by John Lacy was an important innovation. This objective management system provided a meeting ground between science and farming and allowed the producer to benchmark his performance.

It was a major shock within the rice industry when the Department decided to close the extension services and Industry were forced to provide their own extension service that was modelled on the service provided by the Department.

Cooperation with Industry

The close cooperation between the Department and Industry has been key to the success of rice production in NSW. The industry has provided financial support for the research, development and extension services of the Department since the 1950's. This was dramatically expanded after 1979 and resulted in improved yields, better quality and a greater commitment to extension. They facilitated the arrangement with the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC – later to become AgriFutures). RIRDC managed funds from industry levy payers and the matching Commonwealth contributions. This provided additional funds for the research and extension.

The increased collaboration facilitated the creation of the CRC for Sustainable Rice Production in 1997. Under the leadership of the NSW Department, this CRC saw important research and extension on aspects of sustainability, agronomy, grain quality and new products, and cold tolerance research. It was a partnership of organisations including the NSW Department, CSIRO (at Griffith and Canberra), The University of Sydney, Charles Sturt University, SunRice and RIRDC. A particular success of the CRC was the education component that saw the development of expertise for the industry. The CRC closed in 2005.

A collaboration was established between the Department, SunRice and RIRDC to fund the breeding program following the closure of the CRC. This saw increased funding for the breeding program and improved information flow from the industry to the program. This culminated in the development of a new cold tolerant variety by Dr Peter Snell, (currently named VO71) that has improved yield potential, better cold tolerance and greater adaptability. It is now the mainstay of the industry.

Parting of the Ways

The last ten years has seen some greater challenges for the rice industry. The issues surrounding water reform, drought, competition from other crops -

particularly cotton, nuts and, to a lesser extent maize and soybeans, has led to reduced rice areas and hence less rice. There was a recognition that improved water productivity was required and this led to some dispute about the best way to achieve the water productivity goals. A report fostered by AgriFutures proposed that privatisation of the breeding program would be more efficient. Negations surrounding this move became acrimonious, and the Department decided that they could not be a part of a privatised breeding program. A new company (Rice Breeding Australia) was formed from a partnership between AgriFutures, SunRice, and the Ricegrowers' Association. Thus, a long and important relationship between the Department and the industry for rice breeding has come to an end. This partnership saw the rice industry flourish and become a mainstay of agricultural production in the Southern Murray Darling Basin with important agribusinesses in the region – particularly with rice mills and associated stockfeed production providing essential employment in towns such as Leeton and Deniliquin. The Department continues to provide some research services in agronomy, entomology, technical support and occasional pathology support, but it is no longer the main supplier of information and support to the rice industry after an association of around 100 years. In addition to the Departmental people named in this article, many others have made a significant contribution to rice in NSW. It is not possible to name all, and many have made very significant contributions over the years. An important feature of the Departmental contribution was the close collaboration between all arms of the Department and the industry with the sole aim of producing a more productive, sustainable and profitable industry and viable communities in the southern irrigation areas.



The Breeding Four (from left) Peter Snell, Russell Reinke, Laurie Lewin, Don McDonald



Brian Dunn using the EM31 to test for rice soil suitability



Field days were an important link between the farmer, research and extension

Sydney Luncheon

NameI will be attending the Luncheon at Club Sydney on 13 August 2024.
Payment of \$35.00 by EFT to CBA BSB 06-2263 A/C No 00903542 Agricultural Retired Officers Association and make sure to include your surname name. Please email Col with the information .
Payment by cheque -Snail mail to Colin Short 27 Chesterfield Rd Epping NSW 2121