

OLD AGGIES

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 Secretary: Graham Linnegar, (02) 9527 1830, helgra@linnegarplumbing.com.au
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Alstonville luncheon

September 2024, venue TBA. 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

November 2024. Venue TBA. Contact Geoff Warr (02) 4342 3226 or 0411 128 936 or warries509@gmail.com

Orange luncheon

October 2024, venue TBA. 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

Wollongbar Research Station

A group of ex employees from Wollongbar have started a small luncheon group and held their first lunch on 1st December 2023. For further information contact Debbie Martin debgeoffmartin@7mail.com or Allan Stephenson dastevo@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 President's Desk

Funny how we say regularly “another year has passed – they disappear faster now than they used to” Certainly 2023 has just flown by and here we are two months into 2024 (our 42nd year)

I would like to acknowledge the work of our regional organisers of Old Aggies and the executive office bearers who all work tirelessly behind the scenes to run our organisation and organise the many luncheons. These luncheons provide great camaraderie among former work colleagues, many of whom are considered life-long friends.

In January I attended along with John Davis and Bruce White, the funeral of Nancy Heptonstall, wife of Dave. Nancy was a good friend to many of Aggies.

Finally, I invite you all to attend the next luncheon/get-together of the Old Aggies Group in your local area.

Frank Doughty, President

Scott Hansen, Director General NSW DPI Stood Down

The secretary of the Department of Regional NSW (DRNSW) Rebecca Fox made the decision to terminate Mr Hansen after a review of the departments which sit within the Regional NSW cluster which includes the NSW Department of Primary Industries.

Through the decade, having worked with five agriculture/primary industries ministers, Mr Hansen made a substantial contribution to assisting the state's producers and communities through difficult times, including droughts, COVID-19, fires, floods, and biosecurity incidents.

In working with ministers Katrina Hodgkinson (2014-15), Niall Blair (2015-2019), Adam Marshall (2019-2021), Dugald Saunders (2021-2023) and Tara Moriarty (2023), Mr Hansen played a major role in supporting the establishment of the newly formed Local Land Services, introducing the Marine Estate Management Act 2014, introducing the Biosecurity Act 2015, securing \$150m for investment into NSW DPI research stations, introducing the Right to Farm Act 2019, amending the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979, battling a Japanese encephalitis disease outbreak and Varroa mite in bees, preparing for a potential foot and mouth disease or lumpy skin disease incursion, and creating a legislated Independent Biosecurity Commissioner for NSW with the Biosecurity Amendment (Independent Biosecurity Commissioner) Bill 2023.

Mr Hansen was well regarded by staff at NSW DPI and recognized as 'having done a good job'.

Department of Agriculture, Department of Primary Industries, Department of ...???

The termination of the services of Mr Scott Hansen, Director General of NSW DPI has highlighted changes in the organization.

Primary Industries is now part of the mega Department of Regional NSW which is comprised of number of ministries under the direction of 5 Ministers of the NSW Labor Government.

- Honorable Tara Morriaty MLC, Minister for Agriculture, Regional and Western NSW.
- Honorable Ryan Park, MP, Minister for Illawarra and South Coast.
- Honorable Courtney Housses, MLC, Minister for Natural Resources
- Honorable Rose Jackson, MLC, Minister for Youth and North Coast
- Honorable David Harris, MP, Minister for Central Coast.

Corporate Services for all of these departments is provided by the new Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure and is located in the Ian Armstrong Building in Orange, NSW.



Dr Richard Sheldrake, Dr Kevin Sheridan and Mr Scott Hansen

Vale Dr Kevin Sheridan AO

Dr Kevin Sheridan BScAgr, MS, PhD retired in 2012 after a long and distinguished career which commenced as a Research Agronomist at DPI Tamworth Agricultural Research Station in the 1960s. During his time with DPI, Dr Sheridan performed roles including Director Agronomy Research, Chief of the Plant Industry Division, Assistant Director General and Deputy Director General. After a short time outside DPI with the Public Service Board of NSW, Dr Sheridan returned to DPI as Director General in 1988, as the tenth head of the Department, a position he held for 14 years. Dr Sheridan was known by industry, staff and across Government for his leadership and vision for the future.

Dr Sheridan, together with then Minister for Agriculture Ian Armstrong, was responsible for the successful relocation of DPI head office from Sydney to Orange in 1990, on the grounds that public servants should be closer to the industry they serve. The project is still considered the largest Government decentralization ever undertaken.

During his time as Director General shifted the focus of DPI activities to key areas from which our industries and communities benefit from and build upon today including improving NSW trade opportunities, and focus on the long-term sustainability of the agriculture and fisheries sectors.

During his time at DPI he became known to staff for his attention to detail, and his philosophy that “the role the Department is to serve the Minister of the day”, a philosophy that has ensured that DPI has endured across many changes of Government and one that we maintain at DPI today.

In 1999 Dr Sheridan was awarded an AO for service to the agricultural industry as a leader in the development of policy at state, national and international levels, to overseeing the restructure of service in the agricultural sector and promoting research and education in primary production.

Dr Sheridan remained deeply invested in DPI in the 20 years after his retirement, in recent years an honored guest at our 130 year celebrations at the new Ian Armstrong Building in Orange, and always maintaining contact and keeping in touch with our activities.

I had the benefit of being able to draw upon Kevin’s insights and advice over previous years. He was a wealth of knowledge, and a fierce advocate for DPI.

Scott Hansen

Dr Kevin Patrick Sheridan AO

Agricultural industries everywhere were incredibly fortunate to have Kevin as an intelligent, insightful and influential advocate for so many years. He promoted world-leading pure and applied research, firmly integrated with practical advisory services and regulatory functions while also supporting rural and regional communities through his direct input into initiatives such as the Rural Women's Network, CWA, Sisters of Charity Outreach at St Vincent's Hospital and Rural Mental Health organisations... to name but a few.

Throughout his life, Kevin was a great source of comfort and advice to staff, friends and families with a problem. Following his retirement and without fanfare, Kevin held reading classes for young students at St Mary's Primary School.

Kevin Sheridan's ability to lead the team to successfully decentralise the head office of the Department of Agriculture from Sydney to Orange is legendary, along with his fierce protection of staff numbers and functions, while bringing the departmental budget in "on target" year after year.

Even with failing health, his mind was still razor sharp. He could readily recall individual staff members, funny incidents, VIP and Royal visits, agricultural emergencies and high-level political decisions. His strong faith saw him face his health issues with great courage and aplomb.

We will miss him ... miss his support and guidance, miss his friendship, miss the corny jokes exchanged at our regular "Saturday cynics' luncheons". However we are reassured by Kevin's strong belief that he is now reunited with his beloved Iris, which prompts the old adage: "Weep not for he is gone; smile because he was here".

Col Begg, Dick Jane, Phil Small

Vale Stephen A. Barwick - 13 September 2023

Steve Barwick graduated with Honours from Sydney University in 1972, and commenced work with NSW Agriculture at Glen Innes as a Livestock Officer (Sheep & Wool).

He moved into research in 1974 and his carcase work became an MSc in 1979. He was promoted to Principal Research Scientist in 2009.

In 1985 Steve took up an AMLRDC overseas study award to do a PhD in genetics under Walt Harvey at Columbus, Ohio. The time spent in the US was instrumental in Steve realizing his ambition was to

utilize knowledge for the benefit of industry, and this was to prove the driver of his career.

Coming from a family background in sheep and cattle breeding, Steve was eminently suited to returning to AGBU, which he did in 1989. He became Associate Editor of the Journal of Animal Science, was Leader of NSW Agriculture's Beef Breeding and Evaluation Team, co-supervised PhD and other students, published 170 papers, and was an invited speaker and chairperson at numerous AAABG conferences. His more recent work included how to select to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in beef cattle simultaneously with making economic improvement, and how to select across as well as within breeds.

Perhaps the best known outputs of Steve's research are the BreedObject analytical software and web-based delivery systems for selection index construction and delivery that are used in all major Australian beef cattle breeds and in New Zealand, the UK, South Africa, Namibia and Argentina.

Steve's research has been pivotal to improving the efficiency, profitability and sustainability of Australia's livestock industries. He has led the research into beef cattle breeding objectives and selection indexes for the national and international application of BREEDPLAN genetic evaluation, and the resulting genetic gain has been calculated to be worth hundreds of millions of dollars to the beef industry.



Steve Barwick

Vale Laurie Hull - 17th September 2023

Laurie Hull was born at Woonoona on the NSW south coast but grew up at Gumly Gumly, Coolamon and Wagga Wagga.

After he finished school he worked at a pharmacy while studying at Wagga Technical College to learn wool classing. On completion of the course he worked wool classing for many years.

A young Laurie traveled overseas with his brother Geoffrey for 5 years. On his return in a ship he met a young lady by the name of Leola and they eventually married and had been married 60 years.

In 1975 he started with the Department of Agriculture 's sheep Fertility Service at Wagga Wagga and in 1977 he became the first Regional Livestock Reporter. He would always sign off with "Laurie Hull Wagga"

He was a member of Probus. He had a strong Christian faith being a member of the St Aidens Presbyterian Church in Wagga. Was President of North Wagga Public School P & C for 13 years and a member of Wagga Masonic Lodge and OMNI (Old Men New Ideas)

Laurie is survived by Leola two daughters two sons 10 grandchildren and 1 great child.

He was 94.

James Hamilton

Vale Don Jones - 23 October 2023

Don worked at Glenfield and Menangle and passed away after a short illness of Mesothelioma.

Don was the initiator, driving force and programmer behind the Labsys database system implemented in the mid-1970's to record accessions to the NSW Veterinary Laboratory System. It was still in use in the early 2000's.

Don made a massive contribution to data management within the NSW DPI Veterinary Laboratory System as well Plant Pathology and Residues testing in later years.

It revolutionised disease recording when computing was in its infancy. The incorporation of a financial module was way ahead of its time. Don struggled at times to maintain ongoing financial and logistical support from the Department - but he persisted!

Ian Links

Vale Brian Reid - 17/08/1940 - 29/09/2023

Brian was engaged at the Wagga Wagga Agricultural institute from 1st November 1974 to 12th January 1990 as field assistant in the wheat breeding program then as storeman servicing the whole of the Agricultural Institute.

Brian was held in high esteem amongst his work colleagues at the Institute and in the wider community. Brian was a valued member of the team and he was a team player who worked meticulously and effectively both in the field and in the store. Brian participated in social events held at the Institute.

Brian hailed from the Mimosa area near Temora. Brian loved flying various types of airplanes and he liked pulling machines apart to see how they worked. Brian liked to fish and to be with family.

Brian was highly respected in the general community. Brian is survived by his wife Ann, Cherished father and father in law of Andrew & Melinda, Kylie & Darren, and David & Vicki and 10 grandchildren.

James Hamilton

Vale Keith Favell 6/9/1952 - 16/10/2023

Keith was born in Junee in September 1952.

After graduating from Ju nee High in 1970, Keith began an accountancy course through TAFE and set up residence at Wagga Ag College, where he worked for the Department of Agriculture. He played rugby union for the Aggies.

His Public Service career took him to a number of short-term locations for a variety of Departments, during which time he gathered a wide circle of friends. Keith resigned from the Department in 1988 and joined to State Emergency Services during which time he was 2nd in charge and was involved in the response to several major disasters.

The last couple of years have seen Keith follow the steps of his father - the legendary Bruce from Junee who regularly rang 2WG with any number of bizarre suggestions. Keith's own letters to the Daily Advertiser were more realistic but somewhat ironic in hindsight.

Keith Favell was a walking contradiction. He lived happily alone in Hayley's Doyle Avenue chocolate-box but could be a gregarious presence when let loose on the wider population. The ladies in particular talk of his courtesy and kind heart while his closest friends trembled in fear that they might be the victim of his next elaborate hoax.

Information provided by Brian Favell (brother)

Dr Tony Williams 26/3/1938 - 26/1/2024

Dr AJ Williams was probably the most critical, thoughtful and well prepared scientist many of us ever came across. He was always completely informed about the metabolism and biochemistry of the sheep he so often worked with. He knew a great deal about wool growth, wool follicles and the amino acids which contributed to wool.

Tony was a very real inspiration for many as he embarked on a research career directed towards sheep physiology, nutrition, and wool growth at the cellular and molecular level. In no small way Tony's approach to science and its practical application in industry led to many advances in Australia's merino industry. He published widely in high quality, refereed scientific journals, contributed chapters to several text books on wool production and regularly presented his research results to scientific conferences. His work was often cited in highly reputable international journals such as the Journal of Animal Science (Cambridge University). His colleagues thought very highly of him, the following excerpts from their responses to being notified of his passing give you an insight into this:

"I had the privilege of working with Tony Williams first as a research colleague and then as group Director. Tony was intelligent and hard working but above all a gentleman".

"My recollection from Trangie is that of a calm polite and cheerful intelligent man"

"Tony was a good thinker and will be missed"

"Tony was a very real inspiration for me. In no small way Tony's approach to science and its practical application in industry led me to a very fulfilling career as Professor of Animal and Veterinary Sciences at The University of Adelaide".

Tony did a lot of his early research under difficult conditions without modern technologies and basic equipment. Manual calculators were difficult to access, there were no computers and statistical analysis meant a trip to Sydney on the "Bourke Mail", where you risked sharing a sleeper with some terrible drunks! Likewise there was no such thing as emails or texts or mobile phones – you relied on the Trangie manual telephone exchange or the snail mail.

He was always battling administrators for funding competing against the purchase of new tractors rather than expensive laboratory equipment. This was exacerbated by the industry research funding favouring the applied research that could show an immediate result to the producer rather than funding the basic science behind it all.

Tony was always generous in his recognition of his support staff in his publications both by inclusion as co- authors or with acknowledgment. He treated them with respect and always helped with the menial tasks like mucking out animal houses, feeding sheep or doing lambing rounds at weekends in the wet. He had the ability and willingness to put in the "hard yards" often having to and always volunteering to do all night processing of samples when required.

Information collated by Geoff File.

Stephen John Elliot 18/9/1958 - 20/12/2023

Stephen John Elliott who many of us know as Steve sadly passed away on 20th December 2023 after a long illness. He is survived by his wife Louise and sons, Paul and David.

In 1989, Steve met Louise at Adelaide University where they were both studying natural resources at Roseworthy Campus. Louise loved Steve's adventurous spirit, his love for his family, his interest in politics and the environment but above all his conscientious, intentional and positive approach towards living. This was the start of a lifetime together with their sons Paul and David.

In the late 1990s, Steve was diagnosed with throat cancer. I first met Steve on his return to work in 1999 and what I remember most is his steadfast positive mindset and how determined he was to recover so that he could see his young boys grow up which is exactly what he did.

Steve Elliott joined NSW Ag in 1996 coming from South Australia where he had been working on water management with the River Murray Water Resources Committee.

He accepted the position of Waterwise on the Farm Project Officer, a NLP funded project, to develop a 'Waterwise on the Farm' program for NSW. This was to be an adaptation of the highly successful urban Waterwise Program run in Queensland. Many changes were taking place in the Water Management Subprogram as NSW Ag evolved to take on a broader role in irrigation extension and water management as part of the State Governments broader water reforms as that time.

Steve moved on from the Waterwise on the Farm Project Officer to become the Departments' first Water Policy Officer and played an instrumental role in the development of the NSW Government's NSW Water Reforms Structural Adjustment Program. Steve coordinated the development and later implementation of the \$25 million NSW Water

Reforms Structural Adjustment Program (known as the Waterwise on the Farm Program) and its 'Introduction to Irrigation Management' course, guidelines for farm level Irrigation and Drainage Management Plans and funding for their implementation. He undertook this as Coordinator WRSAP Implementation.

Steve, with his South Australian connections, accessed The RiverCare Irrigators Manual (developed and revised by the River Murray Water Resources Committee and Primary Industries, South Australia in 1997) in the development of The Introduction to Irrigation Management Course utilised as part of the WRSAP. Over 5000 irrigators across NSW undertook this course.

Steve's vision for the program contained education (Introduction to Irrigation Management course), implementation of works (IDMP Guidelines and works funding) and evaluation (through the works of Water Use Efficiency Officer).

At the conclusion of WRSAP in 2003 Steve moved onto broader water policy and policy coordination roles in a number of NSW Government agencies, finally with the Department of Enterprise Investment and Trade in 2023.

Liz Rogers and Eddie Parr.



Steve Elliot, Eddie Parr, Penny Wheeler, Liz Rogers, ??, Steve Wedd, ??, Randel Hannah

A Letter to the Editor

I read with interest the informative and interesting article "Animal Health History and Services provided by NSW Department of Agriculture" in Old Aggies Newsletter July 2023. I would like to draw your attention to three important animal health programmes not mentioned in this article. Outbreaks of Swine Fever occurred in the County of Cumberland in 1942-43 and 1960-61. In each case the disease was eradicated. The first outbreak was of virulent disease.

It resulted from either imported pig meat or food refuse from ships being 'swill fed' to pigs. The origin of the 1961 outbreak is unknown but probably similar. This outbreak was caused by a strain of low virulence and only came to official attention as a result of higher than normal condemnation rates for 'septicaemia' of pig carcasses in abattoirs, and increased mortality rates in poorly run piggeries with a high prevalence of secondary bacterial infection.

As a new graduate I was involved in this outbreak before transferring to my original appointment as Veterinary Officer, Board of Tick Control.

In 1918 Royal Commissioner Fletcher recommended to the NSW Government that a local **Board of Tick Control** be established. The Board was established under legislation several years later and the Board members were appointed on 18th January, 1920. The role of the Board of Tick Control changed over time. Originally the Board had responsibility for control of cattle tick and staff management.

This committee was an industry representative body with an independent chairman providing advice to the NSW Minister of Primary Industry on cattle tick issues. It had no direct powers to enforce the requirements of the Cattle Tick Programme nor any statutory role in staffing matters. The Cattle Tick Programme has contained the spread of cattle ticks and subsequent activities have decreased the extent of infestations in NSW. More details about cattle ticks can be found in an article I wrote in an Old Aggies Newsletter in 2009.

The Commonwealth Department of Primary Industry was responsible for the two Acts administering both imports and exports **Quarantine Act (1908)** and the **Export Control Act**. With the creation of the Commonwealth Department of Health 1921, quarantine policy was invested in the health portfolio. Service delivery aspects of animal and plant quarantine continued to be carried out by State Department (as was the case before Federation) while human quarantine services were gradually taken over by the Commonwealth. The quarantine function remained under the Department of Health administration until being transferred to the Department of Primary Industry in December 1984. The States continued to deliver operational services to quarantine under formal agency arrangements with the Commonwealth until 1995. In 1995 service delivery functions were transferred from the States to direct Commonwealth control.

*Dr Frank Doughty
Former Chief Quarantine Officer (Animals) & Director
Animal Quarantine & Livestock Exports*

A brief history of agricultural education within NSW Department of Primary Industries

Cameron Archer, Principal Tocal College 1987-2015

Agricultural education has been embedded in the DNA of the NSW Department of Agriculture since its establishment in 1890. The then minister stated:

In, short the aims of the Department are to help those now on the soil, to educate their own sons and daughters who will succeed them, and to offer every facility and encouragement to wider and more intelligent occupation of the still unsettled tracts of the country.

Hawkesbury Agricultural College was opened with 25 students in 1891. It subsequently served as the cornerstone of the department's operation for the next 80 years, educating many who spent their careers with the department. A Hawkesbury Diploma of Agriculture was a highly regarded qualification and HAC graduates were sought after by industry and government across Australia and beyond.

The aim in the 1890s was also for the department to establish farm schools in various locations around the state. Over the next 20 years these were opened at eight locations: Wagga 1896; Bathurst 1897; Wollongbar 1903; Cowra 1911; Yanco 1911; Glen Innes 1912 and Grafton 1912. Each had substantial buildings providing residential accommodation and training facilities. The numbers in the farm schools were based on the available accommodation, often around 12.

Some of these farm schools had adequate enrolments but others such as Cowra, Wollongbar, Grafton and Glen Innes were poorly supported. A curious solution was found to enable these farm schools to remain viable.

Australia's fear of invasion by a foreign power is not new. In 1909 the citizens of NSW got themselves in such a state of excitement (fear, concern of being invaded) that they voluntarily raised 90,000 pounds (\$15.5m. in 2023) to have a battleship built to be called the Dreadnought. The battleship was never built.

Somehow half the money was allocated to establish a trust with the following aim:

Worthy British boys can be received, taught and boarded free for six months or a year, and distributed to the farmers of the state.

The scheme commenced and the farm schools were used to house and train the boys. It operated until 1939. By 1929, 5,488 boys had arrived in NSW. Many of these boys remained in rural NSW and in some cases purchased or inherited land and became family farmers

in their own right. Family historians often refer to a forebear as being a Dreadnought boy.

After WW1 training was made available to exservicemen on some departmental farm schools. By then Trangie Experimental Farm was established and in 1924 it enrolled small numbers of exservicemen in a training program.

In 1928 Yanco Experiment Farm—also a farm school—was handed to the Child Welfare Department to continue as a training establishment for boys. Experimental work was continued on the property. This coincided with significant building works, which created the lovely quadrangle suite of buildings that remain to this day. It also included a small, stand-alone solitary confinement gaol, which is also extant. During WW2 the residential facilities were used to house prisoners of war who worked the farm to produce vegetables and vegetable seeds for the war effort. Later the whole establishment came back into the department's operation.

I have not identified when the farm schools closed but because only small numbers of local boys enrolled they struggled to remain viable. There was also a strong feeling by some farmers that they knew best for their boy and what could a public servant teach them! If they were to take over the farm, then a few years away jackerooing was the best training. Some sites were used for ex-servicemen training after WW2.

A legacy of the farm schools were the buildings, which were purposefully constructed for residential accommodation, usually two storey and built of timber. Most of these beautiful buildings have been demolished, except from the brick version at Glen Innes. The cost of maintenance and their design, which did not suit the requirements for research infrastructure, made them redundant.

After WW2 there was pressure to have another Hawkesbury and in 1949 the facilities of the Wagga Farm School became the campus of Wagga Agricultural College. These two colleges operated in parallel educating young men who left school after the then intermediate certificate (now year 10) or the leaving certificate (now year 12). While some returned to family farms most did not – in fact going to agricultural college was seen as an honourable exit from the drudgery of day-to-day farming. For others from the city, college was an entry into all things rural for those who had few country connections.

By the 1960s there was pressure to establish specialist colleges for educating boys specifically to work on, manage or own farms. The Department opened Yanco Agricultural College in 1963. At this time the estate of

CB Alexander was being applied by the Presbyterian Church to build an agricultural college on the Tocal property at Paterson. The CB Alexander Presbyterian Agricultural College, Tocal opened in 1965—in years of severe drought. At that time there were no state funds for post-secondary education, so the college struggled financially and in 1970 was transferred to the NSW Department of Agriculture. This move, while in hindsight may seem unusual, suited the government which had remained under pressure to build more agricultural colleges.

Taking on Tocal did not mean that the pressure abated – in fact it continued and in 1971 the department opened Orange Agricultural College.

During the 1960s while this was happening at the state level the Commonwealth Government was putting in place arrangements to take over from the states the funding of universities. This also included establishing a new suite of post-secondary institutions called Colleges of Advanced Education (CAE). The aim of the Commonwealth was to regularise and fully fund the various state-funded teachers colleges, agricultural colleges and related institutions.

At this time the department had five agricultural colleges, but they were each very different. Hawkesbury and Wagga had a diploma course, Orange had an associate diploma course. These three colleges only admitted students post year 12, meaning they were over 18 years old. Yanco and CB Alexander were referred to as the certificate colleges and had two one-year certificates—certificate and advanced certificates. Students were admitted following year 10 and aged 16 years or over. Female students were admitted to all colleges around 1970 – 1972.

There was a fork in the road for the department, with pressure to hand over the whole suite of institutions to be funded under the new Commonwealth arrangements. The phrase often used at this time was ‘academic creep’ meaning that practical farm training would be the loser if the two certificate colleges were lost from the department. The fact that they remained within the department is a testament to the vision and tenacity of past ministers, director generals and senior staff.

The letter offering me a position of Lecturer in Agronomy at Tocal in January 1975 included a caveat that if the college were to move from the department, then I would move to the new entity.

The three agricultural colleges which became CAEs have each had very different trajectories. Wagga merged with Wagga Teachers College to become the Riverina College of Advanced Education. It was a successful merger and laid the foundation for it to eventually

become a campus of Charles Sturt University (CSU). The Wagga Agricultural Institute is adjacent to the university. Hawkesbury became a stand-alone CAE and for a considerable time had ongoing linkages with the department. In the late 1970s it introduced a unique model of teaching and learning that enthused many but created a great rift with its conservative alumni. Problem-based learning and experiential learning put Hawkesbury on the international stage in agricultural education. The positive impact of these initiatives remains today.

Orange had forged a reputation for farm management education based around what was established by the private Marcus Oldham Farm Management Agricultural College in Victoria. Orange was Australia’s smallest CAE and was under continual pressure to merge with a larger CAE like Mitchell CAE at Bathurst or even Hawkesbury. When the CAEs were forced to merge with, or become universities, Orange initially became part of the University of New England, then later University of Sydney eventually to Charles Sturt University. Where are these former colleges today? Hawkesbury is no longer recognised as having any real agricultural education programs, Orange as a campus of CSU runs no agricultural programs, while CSU at Wagga remains one of Australia’s leading universities teaching agriculture.

The two certificate colleges continued in the department and came under the Commonwealth’s Technical and Further Education (TAFE) system. Fortunately, they were able to obtain significant funds from the Commonwealth for capital and recurrent programs during the next 20 years, building up modern infrastructure, machinery and innovative teaching programs.

Around 1980 the writing was on the wall for state-based farmer extension programs and there was a gradual demise of extension services across Australia. The department felt that there was an ongoing need to provide opportunities for farmers to learn from independent experts but in group situations—not one-on-one. The two colleges were the entree into adult learning programs for farmers.

This approach had already been taken by Victorian Department of Primary Industries when the McMillan Rural Studies Centre was established at Warragul in Gippsland in 1977. In 1982 Yanco Agricultural College was renamed Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture in order to avoid confusion with the nearby Yanco Agricultural High School. At that time a concerted effort was put into developing and delivering short courses, guided partly by the McMillan model.

In 1973 the NSW Rural Youth program was transferred to the department from the Department of Education. It included a well-patronised correspondence course program for adults in farm management and farm office management. The courses were run from the department's Sydney head office. In the early 1980s the department decentralised into a regional structure. The correspondence program was relocated to Tocal remaining under head office control. This later moved to the College's control. The full-time courses at the two colleges continued during the 1980s and 1990s but things were changing regarding curriculum. The dead hand of 'one size fits all' in the form of competency-based training emerged, driven by the Commonwealth effectively putting staff into a strait jacket as to what they could and could not teach. This continues to this day. There has been an upside. Because every part of a course is codified and costed, funds are available to deliver short courses which satisfy the criteria for certain competencies. In the 1990s Murrumbidgee introduced the Aboriginal Rural Training program, which has been applauded by many and continues.

Tocal used the correspondence courses as a platform to grow its external studies programs; initially as print materials but now largely online. To supplement this and the short course program it has produced stand-alone publications in two series, namely AgSkills and AgGuides.

Farm apprenticeships were first delivered in Victoria during the 1970s and similar programs ran in South Australia and Tasmania. In 1979 a dairy apprenticeship program was started in NSW with the strong support of the then Dairy Farmers Association. Tocal was a provider along with TAFE NSW.

Sadly, the farm leaders within NSW Farmers and its early organisations did not believe in employment awards and did not get involved with the farm apprenticeship scheme that was then available. Fortunately, things gradually changed and when traineeships became available, general farm trainees were enrolled at both colleges.

In 2003 the numbers of fulltime students at Murrumbidgee fell to around 30, while the college's capacity was around 100 as is Tocal's. In 2004 the college was placed under the management of the Tocal Principal with an ongoing role in adult education as short courses and the Aboriginal Rural Training Program. It was also the base for the joint farm chemical training program (SmartTrain) with TAFENSW. The college remained as a separate institution until 2006 when Murrumbidgee and Tocal were consolidated into one institution trading as Tocal College made up of the two campuses—namely CB Alexander, Paterson and Murrumbidgee Rural Studies

Centre, Yanco, which later changed to Yanco campus.

By then the short course program was embedded across the state with Tocal College staff at Wagga, Camden, Tamworth, Gosford and later at Trangie. The Yanco campus continues to provide a wide range of programs in southern NSW including traineeships, the Aboriginal Rural Training Program and short courses.

Agricultural education in NSW has survived the various changes in education, funding and policies much better than any other state. I commenced this article by saying that agricultural education is within the DNA of the department. While it is easy to be critical of senior public service leadership, I think that the leadership of DPI and its precursor organisations can be thanked for maintaining opportunities for people to learn about agriculture.

Unfortunately, there is nothing similar to what NSW offers in any other state.

The department remains under pressure to justify why it runs a vocational educational institution. It is fortunate that the department has been able to retain education in its portfolio. In the 1990s I was involved in a campaign to stop it all being transferred to NSW TAFE. We know what has happened to TAFE since then. If that move had gone ahead there would be virtually nothing available that could match the services currently available through Tocal College.

Reference
Mylrea, P. J. (1990) In the service of agriculture a centennial history of the NSW Department of Agriculture 1890-1990. NSW Agriculture and Fisheries, Sydney

I have drawn heavily on Peter Mylrea's research for the years before I joined the department. When I was Chair of Belgenny Farm Trust, Camden I got to know Peter well and regarded him both as a fine professional veterinarian and also as an historian. We are indebted to Peter for his research into the department's history. I have had former colleagues review the manuscript to ensure it is as accurate as possible.

Dr Cameron Archer, AM is a renowned historian vitally interested in the history of the Hunter Valley and the agricultural industries. Cameron has outlined the traditional formal agricultural education.

Gosford Old Aggies Lunch 2nd November 2023

20 members enjoyed a pre-lunch chat and then a menu lunch at Central Coast Leagues Club in a new bistro area. Secretary Graham Linnegar and Treasurer Col Short attended, while President Frank Doughty was an apology due to health issues. With all the changes to DPI it is very hard to get any inside information about what is happening to extension and research programs that are still ongoing.

Members enjoyed seeing old friends again and quite a few stories were told by Bob Martin ex horticulturist and MP, who we hadn't seen for quite some time.

Apologies were received from 14 members who either were away or unable to attend due to health issues. We wish them all the best and hope to see them next year.

On a sad note we were informed of the passing of Bob Swan. John and Joan Stone have moved to Howard in Queensland. John co-ordinated the Gosford group up until he handed over to me in 2017.

Geoff Warr

Riverina/Murray Former Aggies Lunch 11th May 2023

All people were welcomed to the 2023 Aggies annual luncheon held at Thomas Blamey Lake Albert. We especially welcomed Barbara & Andrew Read and Steve Sweet and Brian Dear all who travelled from Canberra, and Ian Links who travelled from Sydney. We welcomed Norma Brown (worked at Ag college then Institute) and Joan Taylor (wife of Alan Taylor) to the luncheon. There were 18 in attendance including 1 X OIC, 1 X Station Manager, 1 X RDA & 2 X Directors of the Institute. There were 36 apologies.

We welcomed new members Brian Dear and Wayne McPherson to the annual luncheon who presented updates on their activities since retiring.

David Croft gave an account of the feral brumbies situation in the national parks – Please refer to separate report. David has the ability to keep people intrigued and entertained. Thank you, David. George Stevens (Former Manager of Yanco AI) was not able to attend the luncheon, but he sent the following report “Having less contact with people at the Yanco AI due to declining staff numbers. There are about 5 people in the research laboratory these days. Mark Stevens, the Director, is now within two years of retirement”.

The Wagga Wagga Agricultural Institute will be celebrating 130 years on the 21st October 2023. All invited.

Just a friendly reminder that coffee morning happens on the 1st Thursday of each month at the Rules Club Wagga Wagga at 10am.

James Hamilton

Orange Old Aggies Lunch 11th October 2023



Col Forster, Cathy Kelly, John Mullin, Keith Woodlands



John Seaman, Sally Spence, Ian Roth, Simon Kempson, Peter Witchy



Graham Linnegar, Bruce McKay, Bruce Auld, Mike Curll, David Kemp

The Soil Revolution – the evolution of conservation farming in North West NSW

The largest change this past 100 years in cropping has been from mechanical soil disturbance, via disc and tine ploughing and sowing, the standard traditional method of crop production, sometimes involving up to eight passes over paddocks, to zero tillage. It began in the 1970s. Initially, and for quite some time farmers, agronomists and administrators were sceptical of zero tillage as a suitable cropping system.

Zero tillage to be successful involves herbicides to kill fallow weeds, minimal soil disturbance seeders, plus stubble retention instead of burning or ploughing into the soil early in the fallow period. Rotations to minimise new disease threats were required. New varieties with better disease resistance, avoiding weeds developing resistance to herbicides were needed. Plus much new machinery technology.

A history of how the complex change to zero till farming in northern NSW occurred has recently been documented by former researcher Jeff Esdaile. Titled “The Soil Revolution. The evolution of conservation farming in North West NSW”, it is a detailed 109 page document. Scientific progress has previously been documented by others in technical agricultural journals. However this publication records efforts by many farmers, agronomists and others to adopt conservation farming.

Jeff Esdaile was involved in zero till research and adoption from the start. Initially based at Tamworth Agricultural Research Station (NSW DPI), in 1967 he transferred to be farm manager for Sydney University at the Narrabri Wheat Research Institute. He worked with Dr Bob Fawcett, pioneer and developer of the first soil moisture measuring probe, as well as assessing the role of preserving crop stubble, the role of disturbed soils, either tilled or untilled, for in-fallow moisture capture and storage.

In 1976 Jeff Esdaile became manager of “Livingston farm” a 4700-hectare property at Moree, bequeathed to Sydney University and for the next 24 years he contributed enormously to the development and uptake of zero till farming on a commercial scale.

In 1971 the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) started research at Gunnedah to address erosion in the expanding cropping industry. Their research assessed stubble burning, stubble incorporation, stubble retention and no till treatments. Principal researchers included David Marston, Sheila Donaldson, David Thompson and Geoff Marschke. Research assessed issues like runoff, sediment, soil moisture and microbial activity.

Many farmers and agronomists are detailed in Jeff Esdaile’s document as being major players in the progress and adoption of zero till. Some still are involved today. These include John Thomas (of John Shearer), Len Lillyman, Janke Australia, Monsanto (patented and released ‘Roundup’ in 1974), Warwick Felton, Harry Marcellos, David Herridge, Steven Simfendorfer, Andrew Verrell, Paul Nash, Kevin Moore, Peter Watt, John Kneipp, Brownhill family, Greg Rummery, John Gourlay, John Fahy, Doolin family, David Bailey, Dallas Parsons, Alan Hunter and Nixon family.

Benefits of zero till development and adoption amount to \$100s million a year, plus preserving the food resource base, our soil. Advantages include erosion reduced by 90 percent or more, more water storage and capture, improved crop yields, more organic matter, better soil structure, soils more trafficable, preservation of earthworms and mycorrhizal fungi assisted, and optimum planting time is longer.

However, as Jeff Esdaile notes zero till has not been without its problems. Current and future research is required to address developing issues such as new disease situations, the need to build soil carbon and address weed herbicide resistance.

George Bennett Oval Hawkesbury Agricultural College

George Bennett was honored for his service to HAC where he commenced as a student on a bursary in 1942 and as a lecturer at the University of Western Sydney. The oval at the campus has been named the George Henry Bennett oval in his honor.

George was well known across the agricultural community from the Department of Agriculture, Junior Farmers Network, University of Western Sydney, Royal Easter Show, Rugby Union and of course the 'Old Aggies'.



Are We Old Yet?

Age is only a number, they say.
You're only as old as you feel.
Your grandkids keep you young, they say.
So, getting old – what's the big deal.

Old age means you can look back
and be proud of what you've done;
the jobs you've had, the places you've been
and you see how far you've come.

You've run a dozen sprint races
through phases of your life,
and you're well into the marathon
of marriage with your wife.

Old age means you can also look back
at the people you have known.
There are so many, some really close.
You can see how time has flown.

So getting old is not so bad
with memories of which you're proud;
and a family that has grown so big
that Christmas has become a crowd.

But, we are not as active as we used to be.
We know how our muscles feel.
We eat a bit less and our memory plays tricks.
Let's face it, we're old. Get real.

Len Banks, Orange. Len is the coordinator of the Orange luncheon and is a local artist and poet and has a major involvement in the Banjo Paterson Festival at Orange.