

BOOK REVIEW

The Northern Challenge—A History of CSIRO Crop Research in Northern Australia. By J. J. Basinski, I. M. Wood and J. B. Hacker (1985). (Research Report No. 3, CSIRO Division of Tropical Crops and Pastures, St. Lucia) pp. 186. \$A10 plus postage.

This is a good factual account of CSIRO's involvement in agricultural research in northern Australia which started in the immediate post-war period. The authors have been involved with the field stations for much of that period and are familiar with all of the people and all of the research.

Normally agricultural research is done within the context of an established agricultural industry and is concerned with improving that industry. This was not the case in northern Australia where there was no established cropping industry and only a very primitive grazing industry. The objective of the research stations was to develop the basis for future industries. This absence of an industry context and an industry infrastructure was a severe disadvantage to the scientists and their leaders. There was no body of past experience which could be used to assist in decision making and no body of farmers to interact with. The scientists had to plan their research in a virtual agricultural vacuum.

The book is a very good account of the research done at Kimberley, Katherine, Coastal Plains and Narayan Research Stations and covers some of the difficulties of doing research in the absence of an industry.

The last chapter summarizes some of the operating problems on these remote stations and briefly mentions some of the attributes required in the scientists working on them and in their wives and children. It required a special type of people to leave the comfortable surroundings of southern Australia and move to the unknown small remote communities of the North. It is not surprising that most of the staff had singular characters. As one who knew most of them I would have liked to see more of the individuality of the staff covered in the book, but I suppose that is another book!

The book will be of great interest to all who have been involved, even marginally, with the northern field stations and to those who follow them. It is also a very timely account of a special part of CSIRO's history.

R. A. PERRY