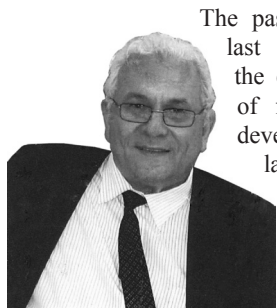


Obituary

JOHN HASTINGS WILDIN (1936–2009)

– Pasture Agronomist and Agricultural Adviser



The passing of John Wildin last September marked the end of a great period of farming and pastoral development in Queensland, a period which grew out of government policy promoting closer settlement after WWII and the concomitant expansion

of research infrastructure and staffing within CSIRO, QDPI and the University of Queensland. It is arguable that the people who facilitated this golden age of agricultural and pastoral expansion were the 'Gatton College Dips' (and their interstate equivalents), who provided day-to-day and one-to-one advice to the new generation of farmers and graziers in this State. John Wildin was the personification of this group of superbly trained and highly competent advisers.

Born in Fiji (one of 10 siblings), John commenced his agricultural education at Gatton Agricultural College in 1956. At Gatton he was renowned for his sporting prowess, especially in field athletics, where he made the javelin, discus, shot put and triple jump his own. He also represented the College in rugby union and cricket. John was rewarded for his leadership, being elected as both Prefect and House Captain in 1958. After obtaining his Diploma, he studied Agricultural Science at Queensland University, completing his degree in 1962.

John joined the QDPI in 1963 and was sent to Theodore to oversee the establishment of the Brigalow Research Station. Often during the early construction phase John would camp alone on the station with his dog. This time instilled in him an acute understanding of brigalow lands and what was necessary to achieve their agricultural potential.

Two observations made while he was at Brigalow Research Station were seminal to

John's future renown as a pasture development officer in central Queensland. He instinctively understood that sustainable use of cleared brigalow lands would involve the development of pasture systems which simulated the structure of the original vegetation. This led to his lifetime interest in browse shrubs and trees, and especially in the role of leucaena in pastoral systems. At that time John's attention was also drawn to the need for low-cost water conservation. He foresaw the value of para grass and water couch planted in seasonally flooded melon holes (gilgais) and swamps in extending the time when green grass leaf was available in areas of variable rainfall. This contributed to his future success in promoting ponded pasture systems over large areas of naturally dry landscapes in coastal and subcoastal Queensland.

During 1972–83 John pursued interests in fodder crops and pasture research, which culminated in the awarding of a M. Agr. Sc. degree from the U of Q. A notable outcome of this research phase was his contribution to the development of Highworth lablab (released in 1973), which remains a key legume forage crop for the tropics. Despite his significant contributions in the area of R&D, both John and his colleagues recognised that his real strengths lay in his role as a communicator and agricultural adviser. Accordingly, in 1983, he became the QDPI's pasture extension specialist in central Queensland.

John's knowledge of pasture improvement generally was always highly sought after and readily given. While he enjoyed nothing better than one-to-one extension with individual landholders, he organised or was a principal speaker at countless field days, and was involved with the numerous media activities which heralded the boom in leucaena and ponded pasture plantings throughout the region.

John was the major driving force behind the earliest adoption of leucaena-based forage systems, which expanded from 24 ha in 1979 to 50 000 ha by 1995. Today, more than 200 000 ha of

leucaena are grown in Queensland. He also vigorously promoted the evaluation and development of shrubby stylos in central Queensland and was significantly involved with the advancement of grass seed harvesting technology.

After a very productive and rewarding 30 years with QDPI, John expanded his horizons in the mid-1990s by resigning to become a private agricultural consultant, another very successful phase of his career. Given his level of expertise, it is not surprising that, during his working life, his knowledge and advice were called upon widely for pasture development projects, not only throughout tropical Australia but also in many overseas countries, including Hawaii, Venezuela, Brunei, Sarawak, Singapore, the Philippines,

Japan, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, Zimbabwe, China, Fiji, Pakistan and India.

John received many accolades over the years, culminating in his being awarded a Fellowship of The Tropical Grassland Society of Australia Inc. in 1996. He met his wife and the love of his life, Barbara Guest, while he was stationed at Theodore in the 1960s. They had three daughters – Tricia, Doone and Brooke – and 10 grand children. Sadly Barbara pre-deceased John in 2008.

John Wildin was an excellent communicator and agriculturalist, a great friend of rural landholders, a terrific bloke and a really good mate. He will be sorely missed.

Bill Burrows, Col Middleton and Paul Back