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history  
of the  
**Department of  
Primary  
Industries**



## HISTORY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY INDUSTRIES

FOR the past 88 years the welfare of Queensland's primary industries has been guarded by Government Departments set up specially for that purpose. The names have changed over the years, usually when responsibilities were enlarged to keep pace with the growth of the rural sector.

However, even before Separation in 1859, the Colonial Administration of the day gave a high priority to rural activities. The main spheres of interest were in preventing the spread of animal diseases and in reducing the prevalent crime of stock stealing.

As sheep were Queensland's first livestock, and wool remained the State's top export earner for about 100 years until overtaken by sugar, the Department really had its beginnings in a need to service the sheep industry. George Appel was the first Scab Inspector (Sheep) in 1855 and Mr. P.R. Gordon was Chief Inspector of Sheep from 1868 and Chief Inspector of Stock from 1871.

On 17 June 1887, a Department of Agriculture was established under the control of the Honourable C.B. Dutton, Secretary for Public Lands, mainly to serve the agricultural and dairying industries.

The stock industries of the time were serviced by a Stock Institute set up under Mr. C.J. Pound in 1893 as part of the Colonial Secretary's Department.

In 1897, the Agriculture and Stock Departments were merged to form the first portfolio for Agriculture with Colonel the Honourable A.J. Thynne as the first Minister for Agriculture.

Agriculture and Stock were separate and distinct branches of the new Department. The Stock Branch was under the control of the Chief Inspector of Stock, except in matters that required the authority of the Head of the Department.

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In 1904, the Stock Branch ceased to be a separate entity, merged with Agriculture and the Department's name was changed to the Department of Agriculture and Stock. The first Under Secretary was Mr. E.G.E. Scriven who continued in that office until his retirement 20 years later.

In these early years before Federation, the Department laid the foundations of the great research and extension organization it was to become.

Scientists like the Colonial Botanist (Mr. F. Manson Bailey), who was transferred to the Department from the Queensland Museum in 1887, left an indelible mark on Queensland's Agricultural research.

Others share the botanist's prominence. Professor E.M. Shelton, of the Kansas (U.S.A.) Agricultural College, became the first Instructor in Agriculture in 1890. Later (1897), he was Principal of the Queensland Agricultural College. His name is linked with introducing the cowpea to Queensland as a green manure crop.

Another was the great entomologist, Henry Tryon, who framed the regulations under the first Diseases in Plants Act (1894). This measure put Queensland far ahead of the other Australian Colonies, though it was not effective until other Colonies had enacted similar legislation.

The role of the Department as a teaching organization was set in these early years. The educational work of the travelling dairy, which began operating in 1889, laid the foundations for a viable dairy industry.

When the travelling dairy began its instructional tours, there were no cream separators in Queensland, no cheese factories and no butter factories. (Butter-making was then a 'cottage industry'). By 1897, factory-made butter exceeded 3 million lb., farm butter 2 million lb., factory-made cheese nearly 2 million lb., and farm-made cheese 400 000 lb.

The Animal Research Institute, which is part of the Department's Division of Animal Industry, consists of three branches: Pathology, Husbandry Research, and Biochemistry. Research and diagnosis on animal diseases is the overall function of the Institute. It prepares vaccines for animal diseases and, through the Wacol Tick Fever Research Centre, has achieved world acclaim for the reliability of its vaccine.

Fauna preservation was transferred to the Department in 1905. This remained a part of the Department's activities until it was transferred to the National Parks and Wildlife Service in 1975.

In the years that followed the establishment of the Department of Agriculture and Stock in 1904, a steady expansion occurred in its activities and responsibilities. For example, the Department assumed economic responsibilities when the Regulation of Sugar Cane Prices Act was passed in 1915.

Experience with wheat marketing during World War I led to the Wheat Pool Act in 1920, the Primary Producers' Organisation Act in 1922, and the Fruit Marketing Organisation Act in 1923. The 1922 Act provided for a Local Producers' Association to be set up in every small centre. This was abandoned in favour of organization on a commodity basis under the Primary Producers' Organisation and Marketing Act of 1926. Mr L.R. Macgregor was appointed Director of Marketing in 1926.

Some other milestones in the 50 years up to the outbreak of World War II are - 1898 the Queensland Agricultural Journal was launched and an Instructor in Tropical Agriculture (Howard Newport) was appointed, 1901 the Agricultural Chemical Laboratory was opened, 1922 the Cotton Branch was formed under Mr. W.G. Wells, and in 1923 a Pig Branch under Mr. E.J. Shelton.

A Pure Seeds Branch, with Mr. F.F. Coleman in charge, was established in 1915. A notable event of the 1930s was the opening of the Bureau of Tropical Agriculture at South Johnstone (1935).

The loose structure of the Department up to 1937 is indicated by the following order of branch reports in the Department's annual report for 1935 - 36: Agriculture, Tropical Agriculture, Pig Raising, Poultry, Cotton Culture, Fruit Culture, Dairying, Entomology, Plant Pathology,

Botany, Agricultural Chemistry, Seeds Acts, Stock and Meat Inspection, Sheep and Wool, Animal Health Station, Marketing.

In 1937, a plan of reorganization and co-ordination of scientific and technical services was drawn up by Professor E.J. Goddard, acting as Science Co-ordination Officer. Only one part of this, the formation of a Division of Plant Industry (Research) was put into operation before the outbreak of war in 1939 prevented further re-organization.

At the end of World War II in 1945, the Department was re-organized and its branches grouped in five divisions according to their activities.

These were the Divisions of - Animal Industry (Veterinary Services, Animal Health Stations, Sheep and Wool, Pig and Poultry).

Plant Industry (Agriculture, Horticulture, Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations, Science and Chemical Laboratory).

Dairying (Field Services and Research)  
Marketing (Marketing Services and Research)  
Administration

The 30 years since 1945 have been a period of tremendous expansion by the Department. Its staff has more than doubled and now exceeds 2 600, while activities not dreamed of in 1945 are now making tremendous demands on the Department.

One such activity is artificial breeding. This began in 1955 as a bull proving project in the Jersey breed on the Maleny Plateau. This was later extended to the A.I.S. breed.

Today, 18 breeds of dairy and beef cattle are kept at the Wacol A.I. Centre to meet the needs of cattlemen. Sales of dairy breed semen exceed 40 000 and more than 28 000 doses of beef semen are sold. The Centre was established in 1962.

A total of 20 000 dairy and 5 000 beef semen doses was exported last year. A semen export centre has been set-up in isolation at Redlands and this produces semen available for export to all countries of the world.

Another milestone was the formation in 1958 of an Economics Research Branch within the Division of Marketing. Re-named Economic Services Branch, this unit is active in meeting the growing demand for farm management advisory services.

The Department now has agricultural economists stationed in 15 country centres. These officers are making a significant contribution to Departmental extension services through being actively involved in district extension programmes.

A Soil Conservation Branch was formed within the Division of Plant Industry in 1961 and in the next year a Development Planning Branch was formed in Administrative Division. These branches merged to make the Division of Development Planning and Soil Conservation in 1965. In 1969, the name of this Division was changed to the Division of Land Utilisation.

This Division plays a major part in co-ordinating the activities of the many branches involved in development planning projects and land use studies. It was actively engaged in the Brigalow Development Scheme which, between 1962 and 1975, developed for beef production and grain growing nearly 14 million acres of brigalow scrub country.

It is now engaged in investigations in the Burdekin Basin. Here the value of the Burdekin flood plains is being assessed for commercial irrigated cropping and grazing. It is also making a study of the Western Arid Region which embraces the Bulloo Shire, a large portion of the Quilpie Shire and the western section of the Paroo Shire.

A significant development in 1974 was the establishment of an Engineering Services Section within the Division of Land Utilisation by grouping the engineers from various branches within the one Division. The new section provides engineering services to the Departmental branches requiring them. These services include machinery, equipment and buildings used in rural production or in storage, transport and processing of rural products.

The Regional Experiment Stations Branch formed within the Division of Plant Industry 1947 was taken over by the Research Stations

Board in 1961. It operates research stations in all major agricultural areas of Queensland and is the successor of the old State farm complex.

Major research stations are Hermitage (grain and oilseeds studies) Biloela (grain, especially sorghum, and forage crop studies), Kairi (maize breeding and tropical pastures), Millaroo (rice research and studies on the utilization of the Burdekin soils), and South Johnstone (tropical pastures, tea and tropical crops).

Major horticultural research stations are at Redlands, Maroochy, Bowen and Kamerunga while the Horticulture Branch also administers the Sandy Trout Food Preservation Research Laboratory at Hamilton in Brisbane.

The late 1960s saw another burst of expansion in the Department's research facilities. The Wacol Tick Fever Research Centre was established in 1966 and the Queensland Wheat Research Institute (financed by the industry) and the Otto Madsen Dairy Research Laboratory in 1967. The Charleville pastoral Research Laboratory was set up in 1968 to study the pasture problems of the drier parts of the State.

A recent move that is expected to have far-reaching effects on Queensland agriculture is the setting up of an Extension Services Board in 1972, followed by an Extension Services Section in 1973.

The aim of this re-organization was to shift the responsibility for planning and carrying out extension programmes from head office to country-based staff.

As a result, more projects are now being directed towards satisfying community needs. In the last year, the Department supported work as varied as Consumer education in storing and using primary food products and assistance in farm and community development in a small dairying settlement.

This is a continuation of the Department's traditional role as a teaching as well as research organization. With a shrinking rural

population and growing numbers of urban dwellers, it is clear that the Department's work in the future lies in providing an education and advisory service to a wider section of the community.

The regionalized extension service set up under the Extension Services Board is energetically moving into this new field.

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