

Vale Peter Wilson

Peter Wilson came from a farming family at Tullamore and completed his B Sc Ag at the University of Sydney majoring in agricultural genetics in 1961. In 1962 he joined DeKalb Shand Seed Company as a hybrid corn and sorghum breeder. He began his association and career in hybrid wheat breeding in the mid-1960's with DeKalb.



Peter was a pioneer wheat breeder in the commercial world of variety development in Australia. He and his small team demonstrated that it was possible to breed and market hybrid wheat varieties and for this to be sufficiently profitable to retain the financial support from the multinational companies, like DeKalb and Cargill that owned the programs.

Using the cytoplasmic male sterile hybrid wheat system where you are essentially running three wheat breeding programs to produce new hybrids, Peter developed and marketed a string of successful hybrid wheat varieties. Hybrid Titan was the first white seeded spring wheat hybrid in the world. Despite multiple changes of ownership of the program, it was Peter's knowledge and leadership that resulted in the development and subsequent release of Hybrid Meteor, Hybrid Pulsar, Hybrid Apollo, Hybrid Mercury and Hybrid Gemini which were readily adopted by growers.

Peter deposited a collection of the best R-lines from his program in the Australian Winter Cereals Collection (AWCC), meaning that the culmination of close to 30 years focused breeding - the male parents of the most commercially successful hybrids ever developed in Australia - were preserved. This meant they would be freely available to anyone who wanted to use them in breeding or research. That was his key motivation and his legacy - a desire to help.

"Peter's determination and foresight have meant recent efforts to re-start Hybrid Wheat Programs globally could build on this solid foundation David Bonnett reports that there are now a new generation of R lines around the world derived from Peter's program.

In 1984 Peter was appointed as an inaugural member of the Plant Variety Rights Committee which led to the establishment of Plant Variety Rights in Australia.

Peter's breeding programs also developed and released the extremely successful high yielding conventional varieties Vulcan and H45 with the latter being one of the first wheat varieties to be

covered by Plant Variety Rights. More than one million tonnes of H45 were produced in 2002 and 2004.

Peter was widely respected as a wheat breeder of both conventional and hybrid varieties so when he retired from Australian Grain Technologies Pty Ltd in 2008 CIMMYT and BASF engaged him as a consultant.

In recognition of his contributions to the industry as a wheat breeder and innovator Peter was awarded the Wheat Breeding Society of Australia's Triticum Award for Excellence in Wheat Improvement in 2008.