



# Roy Sainty

- ▶ **Horticultural farmer with a passion for knowledge and extension of research**
- ▶ **Churchill Fellow**
- ▶ **IREC Chairman for 21 years**
- ▶ **Instigator and President of many groups and associations**
- ▶ **Recipient of IREC Lifetime Achievement Award**



***A passion for knowledge of horticultural farming techniques, be it instigating, creating or sharing it, has seen Hanwood farmer, Roy Sainty, awarded the IREC Lifetime Achievement Award and inducted into the Irrigators' Hall of Fame.***

Roy Sainty's involvement in horticulture has spanned some 60 years. Producing prunes and grapes at Hanwood, Roy has championed and facilitated the improvement of knowledge and technical capacity for all horticulturalists in the MIA. Through extensive participation in field trials and the exchanging of ideas with his peers, some would say he has gained the equivalent of a 'Masters in Horticultural Farming' – from the schools of Farms 13 and 14, Hanwood and the MIA in general!

The Sainty family has been associated with MIA since its inception, with Roy's father Jim being an original settler when he took up Farm 13 in July 1913. Roy was the eldest of Jim and Phyllis Sainty's six children. Roy started his education at Hanwood Primary School and then moved with his family to complete his primary and secondary education in Sydney. After leaving school, he returned to Hanwood to work at his parents' farm for a year before starting his tertiary education at Hawkesbury Agricultural College. He graduated with Honours in 1939, just at the outbreak of World War II.

Roy describes his experience at Hawkesbury as being a very special one, for the first time he 'felt free and felt privileged to study something [he] was very interested in'. In his final year at Hawkesbury, Roy met Nancy Phillips and they married shortly after Roy graduated. The couple returned to live in Hanwood, however their time as newlyweds was short-lived as Roy was called up for service with the Army and spent almost five and a half years overseas.

## **Service to others**

On returning from World War II, Roy developed the strong belief that if MIA farmers were to be successful, and their farms to remain viable, they would have to improve their knowledge base and technical aptitude. With few resources

for research and education programs available, he and his peers saw the establishment of farmer groups for the dissemination of information as the way forward. By 1950 Roy was actively involved in the Hanwood Extension Group.

Roy's involvement in industry groups and organisations grew steadily from this time onwards. In 60 years of farming Roy was President of the Hanwood Extension Group, President of the District Council of Extension Groups, and Chairman of the MIA Citrus Marketing Organisation. He was also a prime instigator in the formation of the MIA Council of Horticultural Associations in the early 1960s, when he foresaw the need to bring together horticultural organisations to improve their strength and to provide for adequate and comprehensive representation to other organisations, such as the Irrigation Research and Extension Committee (IREC).

One of the roles of the President of the District Council of Extension Groups was to be the Council's representative on the IREC Executive. This led to him becoming the Chairman of IREC in 1964 on the retirement of Mr VC Williams, the inaugural Chairman of IREC. Roy remained Chairman for 21 years before he retired in August 1985.

Roy believes this period of his life helped define him.

"During my time with IREC I worked with a number of very experienced and knowledgeable people who helped me come to grips with things I wanted to do with my life – it helped shaped me as a person as well as a farmer," Roy said.

"I was lucky enough to meet a lot of interesting people, for example CSIRO's Officer-in-Charge at the time, Eric Hoare, and members of the rice industry such as Bruce Caldwell, who was secretary of the Riceworkers' Association."

In addition to research and development, Roy gave his time to horticultural marketing in the region, with 44 years as a director of Griffith Producers Co-operative Society.

Sitting on the Board of the Griffith Producers with Roy for more than 30 years was Hanwood farmer Allan Delves who



considers Roy first and foremost a mentor, as well as a long-time friend.

"When you first join a committee or group and you are one of the younger and newer members, you are always looking for someone to mentor you and to answer questions. One of the first people I always turned to when I needed information was Roy," Allan said.

Roy's commitment to these organisations and his enthusiasm for being at the forefront of the technical developments of horticultural farming, are evidence of the great passion he has for his work.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s Roy was the inaugural Chairman of the MIA Citrus Marketing Organisation, which marketed local produce under the brand of MIABEST.

### A Churchill Fellow

Roy's interest in innovation and the technical aspects of farming was recognised in 1967 when he was awarded a Churchill Fellowship for a study tour to California and Oregon, USA. Roy's special area of interest was in the latest developments in the mechanical handling of horticultural crops, particularly prunes. He returned from the USA delighted with the information he had gathered on growing techniques and in the mechanisation methods of harvesting and dehydration. He immediately set to work on implementing some of the new technology he had seen. Working with local industry and his peers, Roy travelled to the USA again to investigate bringing American mechanisation systems in the orchard and the dehydrator back to Australia.

"I think we could grow crops just as well as they [Americans] could, but they were very advanced in their mechanisation techniques," Roy said.

Roy had a particular expertise in dehydration and by installing American designed dehydrators and introducing mechanised tray scraping and stacking, he assisted in the advancement of the Australian prune industry during the 1960s. Along with other prune growers of the area, Roy was also involved in the introduction of mechanical harvesting systems to the Australian prune industry.

### Innovation

Roy's influence on the horticultural industry in the MIA has been very much as an innovator and experimenter of new farming techniques. He has always been willing to pass on his knowledge freely to his farming friends and others. Again, working with his peers, Roy was a pioneer in the development of non-cultivation of vine rows and the introduction of new grapevine trellis systems in the early 1950s.

Roy's innovations include the development of a deep half-bushel case for improved presentation of table grapes that were sold at the Sydney markets.

According to Brian Sainty, his father had a saying, 'horticulture is the art of being fussy and it requires a high amount of attention'.

"We used to get premium prices because Roy insisted on first class attention to detail in packing and quality control. He set very high standards for himself and others around him," Brian said.

Working with John Blackwell from the CSIRO, as far back as the early 1960s, Roy experimented with drip irrigation on vines and prunes. He also worked extensively with the chemical industry trialling many new chemicals that today are in common usage.

In 1967, Brian and Roy established and operated a large and successful vine nursery for almost 30 years. Sainty Farms was at the forefront of planting new and improved vine material, along with establishing new varieties, before the advent of vine improvement societies.

Regardless of the time devoted to innovation and mechanisation, Brian says that his father always considered the best fertiliser for a horticulture farm was 'the shadow of the farmer going over his land'. Being out on the ground checking trees, weeds, water and pests, and knowing the farm intimately, were paramount for success.

In 1989 Sainty Farms was awarded the IREC Irrigated Farm Competition (Horticulture) award and the Commonwealth Bank award for financial management. Today, Farms 13 and 14, Hanwood, remain highly productive grape and prune farms – testament to the sustainable farming practices of the Sainty family.

### Passion for knowledge


Roy and his wife Nancy lived most of their life together on Farm 14, Hanwood. They were married 61 years when Nancy passed away in 2000. They had two children, Brian and Shirley. Brian has been a partner with Roy on Sainty Farms, Hanwood Dehydrators and the vine nursery. Brian remains in the horticulture industry as a Viticulture Consultant and a farmer. Roy's daughter Shirley lives in Griffith.

A quiet, practical and hands-on man with a passion for knowledge and extension of research in horticulture, Roy was 'always interested in improving the lot of farmers'. He has never been interested in farming as a way to a fortune but as a way to an enjoyable and interesting life.

Allan Delves believes Roy Sainty was instrumental in building the success of the MIA and advancing horticultural farming.

"Roy was a very forward thinker, keen to better himself, but who always considered himself a friend to young and old," Allan said.

Roy regards his years as Chairman of IREC and director of Griffith Producers, along with active roles in many other farming organisations and Legacy as a joy and service to others, not so much himself.

Roy Sainty is the highly deserved recipient of the Irrigation Research and Extension Committee's Lifetime Achievement Award 2005. 

*This article has been compiled by Jo Polkinghorne with thanks to Roy Sainty, Brian Sainty, Allan Delves and Harry Creecy.*