

Farmer's seeds of success

Patrick (Pat) Ambrose Farnan AM

Renowned seed exporter

Born: December 10, 1921; Ballarat

Died: January 15, 2008; Melbourne

PAT Farnan played a pivotal role in exporting South Australia's seed harvest internationally, leaving an impressive legacy for today's generation.

The eldest of six children, Pat, who was raised in Glen Iris, Melbourne, was a capable sportsman. He represented St Kevin's College in Melbourne in tennis, cricket and football, and still holds the school's 100-yard sprint record because metrication occurred in the 1970s (hence a perpetual achievement.)

He was a finalist in the Victorian under-18 tennis championships and played some football games for South Melbourne's Second 18 immediately before World War II.

When war broke out, he was seconded to the American Navy as a communications specialist working in Morse code. He announced his engagement to Joan Cleary on Victory in the Pacific Day, which led to a 62-year marriage that produced five children.

With a war service scholarship, he obtained a bachelor of commerce from Melbourne University which saw him juggling the roles of father and student.



Pat became the licensee of the Queens Arms Hotel in St Kilda, followed by the Hotel Culcairn in southern NSW. This led to a period as a farmer near Culcairn, which he combined with full-time work as secretary of the Riverina Seed Growers Co-operative.

He became general manager of Seedco, the South Australian Seed Growers Co-operative, in Adelaide, and the family relocated from the Riverina to Adelaide in 1964.

During his 23-year tenure at Seedco, membership increased from 40 to 455. Seedco became Australia's largest exporter of temperate climate pasture seeds and pioneers in exporting pasture seeds to the Middle East.

Pat's particular personal achievement was the visionary step of taking Seedco into export markets, with the help of a supportive board. Seedco shareholders also acted for some years as consultants and supervisors in dry-land farming initiatives in Libya.

It developed substantial export markets to Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, the U.S. and South America. As a result, the co-operative won four Commonwealth Government Export Awards from 1972 to 1986 for the export of pasture seed and agricultural technology. In 1986, Pat was awarded an Australia Medal.

In 1998, he retired from Seedco and returned to the Melbourne, but remained actively involved with his Seedco friends in SA.

Pat is survived by his wife, Joan, and children Robert, Rosemary, John, Patrick and Susan, 12 grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren.