

# Agriculture his passion

## Dr Robert (Bob) Graham Fawcett

Agricultural scientist, research agronomist

Born: October 1, 1927; Kapunda

Died: July 27, 2009; Tusmore

**B**OB was only son of Len and Margaret Fawcett. He spent his early days on his parents' farm, where times were very hard during the Great Depression.

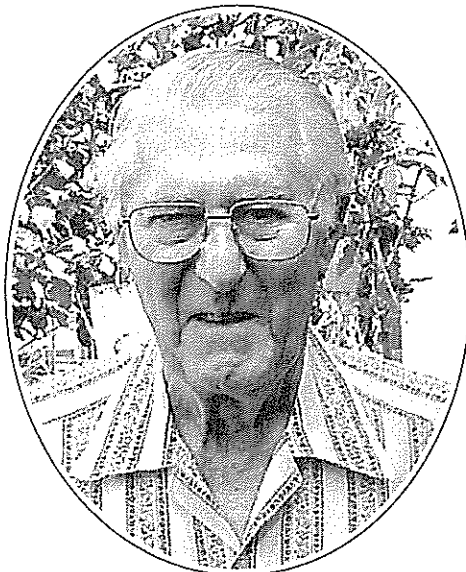
Funded by a partial scholarship and his mother's savings from nursing, he gained entrance to Roseworthy College in 1945.

For three years he studied agriculture, boarding at the college during the week and riding home to Kapunda at weekends. He graduated with a Diploma of Agriculture as dux of the college.

He pursued a career in agriculture research rather than farming - a major turning-point in his life - for a career that became his passion for the next 40 years.

In 1948 he joined the CSIRO in Canberra as a technical officer, doing this for six years. There he enjoyed playing Australian rules football, skiing, tennis and trips to Tasmania and South Australia on his old, army surplus BSA motorbike (top speed 65km/h), camping by the road in a small tent to keep his costs down.

Realising he needed more qualifications to progress up the research ranks, he enrolled at the University of Adelaide to complete a Bachelor of Agricultural Science degree in 1958. He married Helen in March 1959 and spent the rest of 1959 achieving first-class



honours in Soil Science. In late 1959, Bob was appointed research agronomist at the North West Wheat Research Institute in NSW - driving a Morris Minor, often over unsealed roads, to Narrabri, then a small country town.

He built a house and had two sons.

The family was actively involved in the Baptist Church, school and clubs.

Bob qualified as a senior swimming instructor and taught many children at the town pool. In 1968, Bob received his PhD from Sydney University, his thesis - on factors

influencing the grain yield of spring wheats, with special reference to soil-water-plant relationships - taking six years.

Helen typed the 500-page document with carbon copies on a manual portable typewriter.

In 1972, Bob accepted a position with Australia's department of foreign affairs to work in Thailand as part of the Colombo Plan, a major Australian aid program.

After a six-week Thai language course, he and his family went to Thailand to live in Chainat, a small town in the middle of the country.

For three years, Bob worked with Thai research scientists and farmers to develop systems for growing soya beans as a dry-season cash crop in otherwise fallow rice paddies. This supplemented farmers' subsistence income and helped put nitrogen back into the soil. By the end of his time in Chainat, he had been promoted to team leader and was the only Australian to deliver his entire farewell speech in Thai - to a standing ovation from the locals.

Back in Australia in 1975, Bob became a research scientist in the land management section of the SA department of agriculture, at Northfield Research Laboratories.

Until retirement, Bob's professional focus was on developing low-/no-till cultivation systems that better protected SA soils than the traditional deep-cultivation practices imported from Europe.

Bob Fawcett is survived by his wife Helen, sons Jonathan and David, and four grandchildren.

## READER CONTRIBUTIONS

Readers are invited to contribute obituaries. These should include dates of birth and death, and a photograph. Contributions must also include the author's telephone contact details.

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