

# Breaking ground in crop research

**Norbert Maier**

Scientist

**Born:** November 29, 1950; Austria

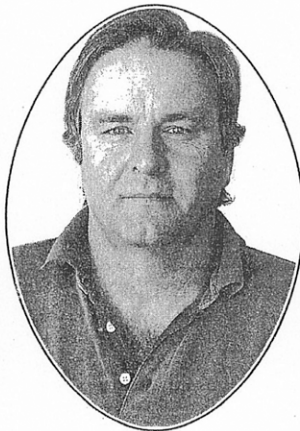
**Died:** April 11, 2007; Adelaide

**S**OUTH Australian horticulture will be the poorer for the sudden loss of one of its most highly regarded horticulture researchers, Norbert Maier – but it will be all the richer through his efforts to foster expertise in the next generation of scientists. Norbert, who served the SA Research and Development Institute and the former Department of Agriculture for 30 years, was a driving force supporting development of the full spectrum of SA's horticulture industries in Virginia, the Mt Lofty Ranges, Murraylands, Riverland and the South-East.

His career was marked by groundbreaking insights in crop nutrition research and strong research leadership.

"Horticulture crops are delicately poised, and achieving the right balance of nutrition can make or break crop establishment, yields, aspects of cooking quality and sustainability, so Norbert's expertise was pivotal to the market success enjoyed by our horticulture industries," SARDI executive director Rob Lewis says. "Norbert had a great critical mind that was highly focused on delivering practical solutions with an ability to extract meaningful information from diverse resources and people."

A long record of achievement led to Norbert



becoming a nationally respected authority in horticulture nutrition, with more than 50 refereed scientific papers, conference proceedings and authorship of key teaching texts to his name. He trained, taught and managed numerous scientists and had oversight of dozens of field trials.

His reputation further grew through his

efforts to share research results with growers, producing significant, quantifiable impacts on farms throughout Australia.

Norbert moved to Australia as a child. He gained two degrees from the University of Adelaide, the first, a science degree in 1971, which led to work at the Adelaide Zoo, before he studied for an agricultural science degree, earning the faculty's Adam Memorial Prize. Norbert resisted invitations for higher studies, determined that his future lay in applied research.

He joined the Department of Agriculture in 1977 as an "over-qualified technical officer". His scientific abilities were noted and he quickly filled a newly created research position to then steadily rise through the ranks of senior management, providing high-level consultancy within his peer group and to industry while attracting significant industry funding for projects.

Dr Lewis says Norbert exercised the highest level of professional judgment and independence in addressing complex issues, with innovative approaches and technologies. "As an example, Norbert's soil test standards for adequate potassium and phosphorus levels for potatoes are still widely used and regarded as the best indicator to growers," he says.

Norbert's favourite pastimes were family and fishing. He is survived by his wife, Elizabeth, and three daughters, Julie, Catherine and Rachel.