

# Lessons of a rural legend live on

## Jack Victor Seekamp, OAM

Advisor, teacher, environmentalist and mentor.

**Born:** September 15, 1921; Renmark

**Died:** February 12, 2007; Renmark

**J**ACK Seekamp was a legend for most of his long life. His teaching and mentoring will be remembered by all those whose lives he touched. Born at Renmark, he received a Bachelor of Agricultural Science from the University of Adelaide in 1942 and was a science and mathematics teacher at Glossop High School.

He was a member of the Australian Institute of Agricultural Science and Australian Farm Management Society and was a specialist in the fields of irrigation in temperate horticulture, production, training, extension, co-operatives, tile drainage and Murray-Darling Basin problems.

Between 1946 and 1977 he cleared and developed his 48-acre fruit property at Renmark, growing mainly citrus but also apricots, peaches, pears, grapes and vegetables. He also operated a small nursery for the propagation and the sale of trees.

He was a foundation member of the Sunraysia Salinity Committee which opposed the Chowilla dam project. Jack was a lone voice in South Australia against the dam and was vilified for his stance. The Chowilla dam was never built. Instead, the SA government became a partner in the building of the Dartmouth Dam, in northeastern Victoria, to help ease the SA's water problems.



Jack was on many advisory groups and made numerous study tours overseas. As chairman of the Renmark Fruit Growers Co-operative he steered the merger of his company and the Loxton Producers Co-operative to form the Rivergrowers Co-operative.

Jack was also a board member of Berri Fruit Juices from 1965-79.

As a TAFE lecturer, he started the fourth course for the certificate of horticulture at Renmark, arranging short courses for

fruitgrowers according to demand, and was involved in producing videos to help promote improved irrigation practices.

Salinity was his torch and he became known as "Salty Jack" for his work in trying to alleviate this problem. "One grain of salt is one too many", he used to exclaim.

Watching the rapid deterioration of the River Murray he became an environmentalist, growing from seed the green box tree, which appeared to be salt and drought-resistant. Postgraduate students were sent to him and hours were spent in the field teaching and mentoring. He encouraged students and others to grow the green box tree and planted hundreds on the Chowilla floodplain, carrying water in the boot of his car to nurture their formative years.

Jack was never idle and kept a photographic record of his work on salinity problems and efforts in the groundwater interception schemes.

He encouraged the development of tube wells to intercept saline waters and regularly monitored test tubes on the floodplain, recording his findings meticulously.

All students knew they could go to Jack for advice and mentoring.

Jack received two life memberships from the Agricultural Bureau, was awarded a fellowship by Flinders University and the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for services to the environment and horticulture. He leaves a wife, Helen, daughters Leonie and Elizabeth, son-in-law Dr Brett Sexton, and grandchildren Benjamin and Katherine.