



Know-how for Horticulture™

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MEDIA RELEASE

Turf icon wins horticulture's top award

The first Australian scientist to specialise in turf research, Peter McMaugh, was named the recipient of the 2009 Graham Gregory Award for excellence in horticulture at an industry dinner last night.

Among Peter's many achievements are creating the name for Australia's most recognised buffalo grass, Sir Walter, developing the drop-in wicket in the early days of one day cricket and establishing Australia's first turf research organisation.

Of his 45-year career Peter says "The thing I'm most proud of is still working in an industry in which I was the first scientist to work full time in Australia."

As director of the Grass Research Bureau NSW, renamed the Australian Turf Research Institute (ATRI) in 1970, Peter oversaw the discovery of a new species of nematode that was devastating turf in NSW's Hunter Region, which led to its control. He co-developed innovative machinery to improve turf maintenance and developed controls to eradicate invasive species in Bent grass putting greens and Couch grass fairways, thus helping to improve the quality of Australian golf courses.

In 1974 Peter set up a turf production farm, Qualturf, and from 1979 Peter also ran a full-time consultancy, Turfgrass Scientific Services. Through this company he has assisted hundreds of fellow growers increase their productivity and profitability. He has also worked with many golf course architects to develop new courses.

Peter's Couch grass collection provided the Australian industry with the superior varieties Winter Green (today's industry standard) and Windsor Green. These varieties have been the base from which other Australian plant breeders have developed the new superior Couch varieties Grand Prix and Winter Gem. Peter jointly developed the new improved buffalo variety Kings Pride.

His scientific expertise, innovation and commercial accomplishments saw many major projects come Peter's way including construction or turfing major sporting venues including: Sydney Football Stadium, the Melbourne Cricket Ground, Fox Studios, Royal Randwick Racecourse, Sydney's Royal Botanic Gardens and seven polo fields at the late Kerry Packer's property.

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Against this impressive array of achievements, Peter says the biggest challenge of his career was setting up turf farms in China. Over a 10-year period Peter established a turf farm in a geographically challenging area of China. It was both a technical and farming success and the model has been replicated all over China.

Over the course of his long career Peter says he has witnessed the industry changing.

"Forty years ago most of the turf was cut out of cow paddocks. Now we're growing single strain grasses. Grasses are being selected for performance and the quality of turf available to consumers is totally different," he says.

"The industry has gone from being a cottage industry to being a very substantial horticultural industry."

The technological changes have been quite dramatic too.

"Forty years ago they would hand cut and hand load the turf, now the trend is to use robotics. Plant breeders' rights have also changed the quality of turf varieties."

Two business owners were named 2009 Young Leaders – Queensland nurseryman Ross Wilson and Victorian vegetable grower Rick Butler.

Ross Wilson says his proudest achievement was setting up his first business, a wholesale production nursery, at the age of 18. Now in his early 30s, Ross runs a successful wholesale tubestock nursery in Mudgeeraba Queensland, Coastal Nursery, employing a staff of nine.

Ross is also involved in industry bodies having been a board member of the Nursery and Garden Industry QLD (NGIQ) Gold Coast branch since 2001 and serving as president of the branch for two years from 2006. He is currently a board member of NGIQ. He has been a role model and industry champion, attaining accreditation and Ecohort certification and encouraging other nurseries to do the same.

At just 31, sixth generation Victorian vegetable farmer, Rick Butler, is the managing director of his family business which employs 70 staff in Heatherton, on the outskirts of Melbourne. The farm supplies supermarkets nationally, and has done so for 40 years.

In 2007 Rick attracted investment funding from Victoria's Smart Water Fund to design and build a vegetable washing system that saves up to 80,000 litres of potable drinking water each day. Rick's innovative soft vegetable washing machine is available for any and all growers to purchase from manufacturer Tripax Engineering.

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