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HORTICULTURE CHIEF RETIRES



The Chief of the Department of Agriculture's Horticultural Division, Mr. H. R. Powell, retired last month after a long career of service to Western Australia's horticultural industries.

Mr. Powell joined the Department as a cadet in 1923 and graduated from the University of W.A. in 1934. He was one of the first group of graduates to join the Department and was the first University graduate appointed for horticultural work.

In 1934 he was posted to Narrogin, then a fruit growing centre, and in 1936 was appointed to the Albany district, which was at the time one of the leading fruit growing districts of the State.

After serving in every fruit growing district except Bridgetown he was appointed Superintendent of the Department's Horticulture Branch in 1940 and soon after faced a difficult situation imposed by the World War, which included supervising the manufacture of food-stuffs in W.A. for all armed forces, and apple and pear acquisition.

The Vegetable and Viticulture branches were added to the Fruit Branch, to produce a unified Horticulture Division under Mr. Powell, during the 1950's.

Mr. Powell is probably best known for his work on disease and pest eradication and plant quarantine.

He directed the successful campaigns which eradicated apple scab in the South West and Albany fruit growing districts, and later several codling moth outbreaks in apple growing areas—the worst in 1956, lasting five years. Freedom from apple scab (black spot) and codling moth are two of the main advantages of apple production in Western Australia—and much of the credit for this must go to Mr. Powell. It is said that successful campaigns against these pests have never been carried out anywhere else in the world.

Mr. Powell has been Chief Quarantine Officer (Plants) in Western Australia for much of his career. His work in this sphere has helped to keep Australia free of many serious plant diseases and has helped establish a sound quarantine inspection service.

Mr. Powell is well known for his work in industry organisation and the instigation of legislation for the benefit of the fruit industry in Western Australia. He has been largely responsible for the setting up of the Fruit Growing Industry Trust Fund, a number of Industry Advisory Committees and for the administration of the Plant Diseases Act. He was the Chairman of the Fruit Growing Industry Trust Fund Committee for 29 years and in recent years has been Chairman of the Apple and Citrus Sales Advisory Committees and the Potato Industry Council. He has also been active as Chairman of the Banana Compensation Trust Fund Committee for many years.

As the second Australian fruit officer in England and the Continent after the World War and later after exploring the Singapore market, Mr. Powell obtained important information on storage and temperatures of fruit in transit. Work which followed has helped improve the quality of Australian fruit exported overseas.

Mr. Powell was last year elected the first Chairman of the Commonwealth and States Horticultural Committee—a reflection of the good relations he has maintained with horticultural experts in Commonwealth and State horticultural circles.

In Western Australia Mr. Powell has been largely responsible for the success of fruit fly control schemes throughout the State. The system of local fruit fly baiting schemes now operating followed a suggestion made by Mr. Powell in 1946. The fifty one baiting schemes now operating throughout the fruit growing areas have been of great benefit to fruit growers, particularly those in country centres.

Backed by the State's fruit growers, Mr. Powell was largely responsible for the establishment of the State's major Fruit Research Station at Stoneville.

He leaves his position as the most important figure in Western Australia's fruit growing industry with confidence in the industry's future, despite marketing troubles and other setbacks it may meet in the future.

"There is a sound core of high producing orchards and good growers who will carry the industry through almost any difficulties", says Mr. Powell.