Deputy Director of Agriculture retires

Department of Agriculture, Western Australia

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The Deputy-Director of Agriculture, Mr. F. L. Shier, has retired after 47 years in the Department of Agriculture. Mr. Shier joined the Department as a cadet in 1922 and after graduating from the University of W.A. was posted to Geraldton in 1926. At this time he was one of only two officers stationed in country districts.

In 1934 he was transferred to Perth as export lamb adviser and in 1941 was appointed Assistant Superintendent of Wheat farming. From then on he was closely concerned with all major developments in the Department of Agriculture’s work in the cereal and sheep areas. He took part in research projects on whose results are based many of the accepted farming techniques in the cereal and sheep areas.

He was co-author with Dr. T. C. Dunne, now Director of Agriculture, of an article in the “Journal of Agriculture” in 1934 entitled “A Modified Rotation for the Wheat Belt”, which set the pattern for the ley farming system now followed in most cereal growing districts.

Later he worked with Dr. Dunne and others on light land research, particularly at the Wongan Hills Research Station and in other central agricultural districts. In 1949 he was involved in the establishment of the Esperance Research Station, and he took a leading part in the light land research there which led to the successful development of the Esperance district and other light land areas in the south of this State.

From 1934 until the mid. 1940s Mr. Shier was involved in sheep nutrition and husbandry research which proved vital to the State’s sheep industries. He was one of the team which carried out early studies on botulism (“toxic paralysis”), then a serious cause of sheep losses in the agricultural areas. Then followed important work on sheep nutrition and fertility and prime lamb production which established the nutritional needs of sheep in the agricultural areas and demonstrated the value of improved pastures and grain supplement in sheep nutrition.

Projects in which he was associated included the research on pregnancy toxoaemia and clover infertility in sheep.

In 1953, the year he was appointed Chief of the Wheat and Sheep Division, he studied agricultural extension in New Zealand and the ideas he formed at this time influenced the development of the Department’s advisory services during his period as Chief of the Wheat and Sheep Division and later as Deputy Director of Agriculture.

In 1955-56 he was given leave by the Department to act as adviser to the Governments of Syria and nearby Arab countries for the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations.

He was appointed Deputy Director of Agriculture in 1961. Since then he has played a major role in the development and day-to-day running of the Department of Agriculture during its period of most rapid expansion.

One of his main aims as Deputy Director was to increase the number of university trained advisers in the field and to develop an effective network of well-staffed, well-equipped district centres. This has been largely achieved.

To help improve the supply of trained advisers he strongly supported the Department’s cadetship scheme. There are now some 70 agricultural and veterinary cadets in training.

A feature of his career was the good relationship he maintained with farmers. Their assistance through the provision of land, stock and machinery for research projects was an important factor in the success of many experiments, particularly in the days when few facilities were available within the Department. Throughout his career he helped to foster the spirit of co-operation which exists between the Department and the State’s primary producers.

Mr. Shier represented the Department on numerous agricultural committees, including the State Meat Advisory Committee, State Wheat Research Committee, the Wheat Research Council, the Animal Health and Production Advisory Committee, the Central South Zone Development Committee, the Commonwealth Wheat Research Committee, and the Soil Conservation Advisory Committee. He is a past President of the W.A. Branch of the Australian Institute of Agricultural Science.
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