

Hart

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MEDIA RELEASE

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The heart of Hart, Kevin Jaeschke OAM farewelled



Kevin Jaeschke at the Hart field site, 2018.
Photo: Gabrielle Hall.

The 'heart of Hart' and a "champion of family and of community" is how Hart Field-Site Group and Hart Field Day co-founder Kevin Jaeschke OAM is being remembered following his death on January 15, 2022, aged 86.

A Hart farmer, Kevin, husband of Lorna and father to Michael, Christopher, Louise and Graham, was integral in the foundation of what became one of the nation's leading agronomy and research sites.

His vision, drive and contagious passion for the Hart research centre and the events that grew out of it are part of his legacy, and son Michael said they remained among Kevin's greatest achievements.

"He was humbly proud at what he achieved at Hart," Michael said.

"It meant the world to him and I could run out of words trying to describe how proud he was.

"It was one of his proudest achievements to see it grow and especially after he left, knowing it was all in good hands to be able to continue to grow from there on in.

"He was passionate about it and just to see all the farmers coming in for the field day year after year, dad just wanted to better his farm and better all the farms around the area.

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“His passion, foresight and appetite for learning new things and putting them into practice, also his innovation and looking for new ideas and trying to improve his farm for future generations were what drove him.”

The initial Hart agronomy trials started in a paddock on Kevin and Lorna's farm in 1982 and continued there until 2000, with the family not only donating land, but also equipment and manpower in those early days to get the crop trials in.

“When we first started, it was taking up about 20 acres of land and dad didn't charge for that, so he donated the land to run the trials,” Michael said.

“We'd always stop our own seeding for a day or two to sow the trials ourselves with our combine.

“But the upside from that, some of the varieties that turned up, we'd see them growing well there and it gave us a bit of a headstart, being able to jump in on new varieties a year or two ahead of most people.”

With neighbour David Maitland and Dr Allan Mayfield, who was with the department for agriculture at the time, they had a vision to purchase nearby land for the specific use of a trial site.

A 40-hectare site was purchased in 2000, with a loan from the Wakefield Regional Council repaid five years ahead of schedule, which remained one of Kevin's proudest achievements for the group.

“Dad was a driver of that, along with David Maitland and Allan Mayfield, and if it wasn't for those three saying 'let's do it' I don't know if it would be what it is today,” Michael said.

“It had been a floating trial site in one of our paddocks on the main road, so car parking was becoming an issue and having it on our farm, with weeds and everything, it was starting to create some problems.

“When a nearby paddock came up for sale, I think David Maitland and dad chatted about it over a bottle of wine one night and the next thing, they'd bought it for the Hart trial site.

“It was another proud moment for dad when that land was paid off and owned outright.

“He was chuffed about it and the night after the opening ceremony I remember going back home with him and he said 'I didn't think this was ever going to happen', that they'd pay it off so quick and to be the only research group to own their own land in Australia was a huge achievement.

“He's left an important legacy for the district and his name is going to be etched in the history books.

“The work dad and that initial group did in getting the constitution all in order and setting it all up, it's gone from strength to strength, and I just don't know that if they hadn't got that permanent site whether Hart would still be here as we know it today.”

Kevin was the founding chairman when the first Hart Field Day was held in 1982, and that first event attracted about 18 farmers.



These days, the group's annual field day in September attracts almost 700 farmers and industry professionals and has been the basis for the foundation of many similar sites and events across Australia.



*Kevin Jaeschke at the microphone with SA Premier Lynn Arnold looking on at Hart in the early 1990's.
Photo supplied by the family.*

Now in its 40th year, Dr Allan Mayfield reflected on the impact the Hart group has had on broadacre trial research across Australia.

“In some ways it was the model for other sites including in Western Australia the Meckering no-till set up, and a lot of other sites around Australia,” Allan said.

“Birchip, for example, was based on what was being done at Hart – we had a group of Birchip farmers came to visit Hart and thought it was fantastic, and on the bus on their way home had already worked out that they could put some money in, where their site would be and who was going to do it.

“Hart is right up there nationally in terms of practical information for farmers, with a combination of expertise and speakers that they attract, and the amazing thing is that it has continued in a similar format that Kevin was instrumental in setting up.

“This is Kevin's legacy, he was instrumental in establishing a field day system that has withstood the test of time and has been inspiring a lot of other field day sites around the country over 40 years.”



Kevin also had a passion for soil conservation and worked on numerous initiatives across the region, with his genuine care and ability to listen to all concerns setting him apart.

Among one of the most recognisable projects seen by locals and travellers, was the Blyth to Brinkworth rail corridor, which was transformed from bare ground to the revegetated trail that is seen today and passes by the Jaeschke's Hart farm.

"If you drove along that road in the 1980s it was still a bare corridor," Michael said.

"The work that Ian Roberts and dad and a few others did along there is amazing, and now they're looking at putting a walking/bike trail along there in conjunction with the council."

Kevin's work with the Hummocks Soil Board and work at Magpie Creek was also a highlight.

Allan said it was some of this work where Kevin's rapport with community really came to the fore.

"I've got a lot of words to describe Kevin," he said.

"When I first came here in 1985, he was welcoming and accommodating just as quite a lot of farmers are, but then I soon came to realise that Kevin was a very strong industry supporter and a great leader.

"He was very generous with his time, he was a good conversationalist, but more than that, he would stop what he was doing and listen to what you were saying and was genuinely interested in what you were doing.

"Through his work with the soil board, he was very invested personally with situations and cases and in trying to work them through to a good solution in accommodating the concerns of all the people he was dealing with.

"He was also quite a visionary and he would bring people in with his enthusiasm and can-do attitude.

"He would see an issue that some people would say 'oh well, that's not a big deal or we can't be bothered' and Kevin would grab it by the throat and say we've got to fix this."

Kevin had an undeniably infectious enthusiasm for all that he approached, and Allan remembered with a laugh, one story Kevin shared with him that simply summed up the energy he had for the projects he was so passionate about.

"When it came to organising the field days, Kevin was always there working behind the scenes and he'd ring sometimes quite senior people and say 'look you really must come along', he was that enthusiastic and his enthusiasm rubbed off on everyone," Allan said.

"But he was always such a people person too. There was one story, to do with his native vegetation work, when the Governor General Bill Hayden came to visit the Magpie Creek Scheme.

"There's a photo around somewhere of Kevin walking along the creek with the Governor alongside him.



"I wasn't there, but Kevin told me afterwards that he was introduced to the Governor General and he said to him 'do you mind if I call you Bill?', gave him a whack on the back and kept walking, and they got along like a house of fire from there on.



Kevin Jaeschke with Governor General Bill Haydon at Magpie Creek.
Photo supplied by the family.

"Just to see Kevin arrive at the Hart Field Days, he'd turn up like the Queen or Duke or something – people would flock to him to have a chat."

Hart Field-Site Group past chairman Matt Dare worked on the initial Hart trial site located on Kevin's farm, alongside researcher Rohan Rainbow trialling the then new no-till farming system.

While Kevin's early interest was in medics and medic pastures, he embraced the opportunity for new technology to be trialled on the site.

"We put one of the Fer-till trial sites on Kevin's farm, researching no-till seeding systems and fertiliser application in one-pass," Matt said.

"That was a significant trial for a period of three to four years on Kevin and Michael's land and it provided another trial for growers to find interest and value in at Hart, and went a long way to promoting one-pass seeding systems in South Australian agriculture."

Matt said Kevin's greatest passion was in the sharing of the trial information with other farmers.

"He really enjoyed the community of it and the interaction between researchers and farmers," Matt said.

"Kevin was involved from day dot and continued to show an interest in Hart and agriculture and all that Hart was about, right through his life.

"What will always stick with me is his smiling face and friendly nature, just seeing him at the field day site, chatting and interacting with like-minded farmers.



“Condolences from all the Hart Field-Site board, past and present, to Michael and all of the family.

“And a huge thank you to Michael, and Kevin in particular, for their input into Hart over the years.”

While Kevin is remembered by the entire Hart community, and those involved in agriculture and conservation in the region and beyond, it is perhaps his most valued role as a family man that leaves the greatest legacy.

“He was a champion of family and champion of the community,” Michael said.

“For the first 15 years of his farm life until I came home onto the family property to help, he was a very busy person – he was running sheep and a piggery and his clover harvesting, but he made a point of not working on a Sunday, he always spent the day with us.

“He always took us to footy and hardly ever missed a game when we were kids, even if some games I might have only got 15 minutes on the field, it didn't matter, he was always there to watch and it is something I have tried to continue on with my own family.”

Kevin was privately farewelled by his family on the family property on January 20, and it is hoped a memorial service for extended family and friends will be held later in 2022.

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