



The Western Australian Farmers Federation

Representing WA farmers for 100 years



*Proud of the Past,
Confident of the Future*

2012 **100** years of WAFarmers

DISCLAIMER: This publication is not intended to be a definitive historical overview of the Western Australian Farmers Federation Inc. (WAFarmers). It has been compiled through researching public records including *On Farmers' Service* by FR Mercer and interviews with each of WAFarmers living past Presidents.

DESIGN AND LAYOUT: Redtail Trading Pty Ltd

The Western Australian Farmers Federation

Representing WA farmers for 100 years



Contents

chapter one	Formation	2
chapter two	The early years, Monger to Padbury	3
chapter three	Sectionalisation	5
chapter four	1930s	6
chapter five	Amalgamation	7
chapter six	Farmers' Union to Primary Industries	9
chapter seven	Western Australia Farmers Federation	12
chapter eight	New name, new location	14
chapter nine	The final word	16

2012 **100** years of WAFarmers

chapter one

Formation

Several small farming organisations were present in Western Australia during the 1890s and early 1900s and it was not until late 1911 that the need for a union of farmers was identified.

In December 1911, a letter from the Rural Workers' Union of Australia (RWU) was sent to Western Australian farmers discussing wages for farm workers.

Farmers and Settlers' Association (FSA)

A letter from Robert Maitland Leake of Kellerberrin, dated February 4, 1912, was sent to other farmers about the wages log received from the RWU. This letter from Mr Leake is seen as the vehicle which was responsible for the formation of the Farmers and Settlers' Association (FSA).

Mr Leake sent a second letter to farmers on March 2, 1912, to attend a meeting in Perth on March 28, where action would be taken on a resolution passed at the Liberal League conference in Perth to form a Farmers and Settlers' Association. Mr Leake invited farmers to the Liberal Club in Perth where an executive would be elected and future operations decided. Following Mr Leake's second letter, meetings were held in country areas to elect representatives to attend the conference. It was decided to form an association to be called the Farmers and Settlers' Association of WA.

A constitution was adopted at a second conference held in June 1912 which the Association would operate under until a special conference to be held in March 1913. Alexander Joseph Monger was elected the Association's first President with Matthew Thomas Padbury and John Deane Hammond as his Vice Presidents.

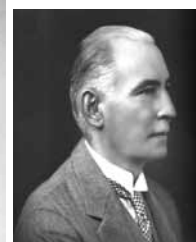
The objectives of the Association were to secure the co-operation of producers in the advancement and protection of the rural industries, to take such action as may from time to time be considered advisable by the executive to promote the advancement of such industries and to act in conjunction with other associations of a similar kind in any other part of Australia.

March 1913 marked the first time in the history of Western Australia that farmers had met in conference for the purpose of discussing affairs with the goal of improving conditions.

At that conference, a resolution was carried that the Association confirmed the principle of co-operative trading and enterprise and a sub-committee prepared a draft agreement to acquire the rights to purchase the Producers' Union.

The agreement with the Producers' Union was approved with Mr Monger and James Gardiner appointed trustees. At the August meeting of the Executive, the prospectus was issued with the proposed name of Westralian Farmers Ltd. After the business was floated, it expanded considerably and at a FSA meeting in August 1915, several leading members of the FSA resigned to focus on their roles with Westralian Farmers.

While the name of the Association changed to the Primary Producers' Association (PPA) in 1920, the idea of a name change was raised as early as 1915 when consideration was given to changing the name to the Primary Producers' Association of WA or the Agrarian Association of WA.



Alexander Joseph Monger, first President of Farmers & Settlers' Association

chapter two

The early years, Monger to Padbury

The decision to enter politics had been raised on several occasions in the early meetings of the Farmers and Settlers' Association. At the March 1913 conference, delegates voted to form the Country Party for the purpose of securing direct representation in the Federal and State parliaments. The decision brought immediate results. The party experienced electoral success which showed the right and strength of farmers to participate in government affairs.

The creation of the National Party in Australian politics saw state Country Party members join the national movement, which was in breach of the constitution. To avoid a split, the matter was closed at conference and Country Party men were to stand as out and out Country Party representatives. After the division that the coalition had caused, it was resolved that future members of the Country Party should stand as outright Country Party candidates but would be allowed to form coalitions and accept portfolios.

A general election was held in 1921, and the Mitchell-Nationalist (not to be confused with the National Party) State Government was returned and the Country Party accepted three portfolios in the Western Australian parliament.

Issues with the coalition began to surface at the 1922 conference when Mr Monger said the partnership existed in name only as the Mitchell Government supported by the Country Party. His complaint was that the Country Party was keeping the Government in office but only had three portfolios.

A general election was pending in early 1924, and at a PPA executive meeting in November 1923, the nominations of the four sitting members was not endorsed. It was decided to call for fresh nominations for these seats. A split followed, led by Country Party Leader Henry Kennedy Maley. Fifteen other members left the party while Alec Thomson became leader of the official Country Party. The general election saw the Mitchell Government defeated with the Collier-Labor Government taking office. The Official Country Party gained seats, while the Maley-led section experienced losses with Mr Maley defeated in his own seat.

The Association's official journal, the *Primary Producer*, which was first published in 1916, began to run into financial difficulty after the decision to increase its size. In 1920, a 12-month business arrangement was made with Westralian Farmers and in 1922 this arrangement was renewed for a further five years. In 1928, a new arrangement was made with Westralian Farmers that a guaranteed amount should be paid annually by both the PPA and Westralian Farmers to fund the journal.



ABOVE LEFT: Country Party leader Henry Maley

ABOVE RIGHT: Primary Producers' Association President Matthew Padbury 1924–1932

Wheat Pooling

The issue of wheat pooling was consistent in the early years of the Association and as World War I broke out, the Commonwealth Government established a marketing scheme under the control of the first Australian Wheat Board (AWB). This board consisted of representatives of Commonwealth and State Governments and representatives of growers. The AWB operated until 1920 and during the five year period the whole Australian crop was pooled and marketed by AWB.

After the war, conference supported the pooling system under legislative authority to be managed and controlled by elected representative growers. However, in 1922 the Eastern States governments ended the pools and the Western Australian Government did not provide legislation. Voluntary pools were set up in March 1922 under the Co-operative Wheat Pool of WA.

Dairy

The formation of the South-Western Provincial Council of the PPA resulted in establishment of the Dairying Section of the Association and the subsequent divisions into butterfat and whole milk sub-sections. Increased membership in the South West led to suggestions that the Dairying Annual Conference should be held in Bunbury and in November 1929 the first representative Bunbury conference was held.

Mr Monger resigned in 1924 over a rift between the executive and parliamentary wings. He was replaced by Matthew Thomas Padbury. Mr Monger had overseen the first 12 years of the organisation and saw it grow from small beginnings into a body which had helped to establish a political party and a co-operative trading company.



TOP: Delegates at the first conference of the Farmers and Settlers' Association in March 1913

BOTTOM: Delegates at the Farmers and Settlers' Association Conference in August 1913

chapter three

Sectionalisation

Sectionalisation became necessary for the Primary Producers' Association (PPA) as the need for specialised consideration by industry representatives for the problems being faced by the various primary industries became more apparent.

The decision to sectionalise helped to give each commodity section the expertise and experience to lobby for the needs of each section. Conflicts with the Political Section and the formation of the Wheatgrowers' Union in 1930 were also factors behind the split into sections.

At earlier conferences, delegates raised concerns that their own particular problems did not always receive the attention they deserved. Political questions had occupied so much time at conferences in the first years of the organisation and, in 1917, Mr Monger declared that delegates could not afford to be continually changing the constitution and wasting time on political matters.

The PPA introduced zoning in 1930 and in 1932 introduced three main sections: Wheat, Wool and Dairying. Eventually, a Barley and Oats Section was formed as well as Butterfat and Whole Milk sub-divisions of Dairying and a Meat Section. Each section contained a central executive and worked together on areas of common policy and direction.

First section meetings

It was at the 1932 Annual Conference that each section met separately for the first time and elected its own leaders and representatives to the General Executive.

Politics

A Political Section was also developed in 1932, which formed and operated under a revised constitution as a separate entity from 1932 until 1944, when the Political Section separated entirely to form the Country and Democratic League.

At the time of sectionalisation, the Southern Woolgrowers' Association joined the PPA because it was considered a larger organisation could exercise greater influence to rectify their grievances than if they operated separately.

Around the same time, the PPA and three other bodies were representing dairy farmers. The WA Dairymen's Association (WADA) and the PPA attended a meeting in Mundijong, at which it was recommended that the various branches of the WADA join forces with the PPA. In August 1931, a meeting of South West delegates attending Annual Conference of the PPA resolved that the only policy that would ensure producers the full value of their product was to consolidate the industry into one body, with its own controlling committee, under the PPA.

BELOW: Delegates at the 1933 conference of the Primary Producers' Association



chapter four

1930s

After sectionalisation each of the sections were faced with the tasks of dealing with events linked to the worldwide depression in the early 1930s.

Wheat

The Wheat Section dealt with stabilisation issues as well as a grain surplus after the harvest of 1930–1931. A decision from the four major export wheat countries to limit production was a result of resolutions first raised by John Teasdale at a conference in Melbourne. The resolution was also responsible for the first International Wheat Agreement.

The wheat surplus issue again cropped up in 1938. This time the Australian Wheatgrowers' Federation (AWF), which the Primary Producers' Association (PPA) had recently joined, asked the Commonwealth Government for a guaranteed price and to restrict the production to the approximate known demand.

Wheatgrowers also continued their fight for the introduction of bulk handling facilities. Growers wanted a statewide scheme however, it was not until 1934 when Cooperative Bulk Handling (CBH) asked the Government to lift an embargo that movement was made at a Government level. The Government appointed a committee to the matter and then announced a Royal Commission to inquire into the position. The Commission found that bulk handling had resulted in significant gain and that it was a viable proposition and a Bill was introduced to give effect to the Commission's findings.

BELOW: Delegates attending the 1939 conference of the Primary Producers' Association



Dairy

Dairying had developed significantly since sectionalisation and by the end of the 1930s had developed into two sub-sections, the Whole Milk and Butterfat Sections.

Bees

The West Australian Beekeepers' Association (WABA), which still exists today, had been in existence since 1905 and honey production records go back to the early 1890s, but it was not until 1935 that the WABA made the move to join the PPA. At the annual conference of beekeepers in May 1936, it was resolved to apply for permission to form a Beekeepers' Section. The section was formed in the following August.

Poultry

A Poultry Section of the PPA was formed in 1937; however, the Poultry Farmers' Organisation of WA (PFO) was formed in 1926. The PFO merged with the Poultry and Eggs' Producers' Society in 1931 to become the Amalgamated Poultry Farmers' Organisation. After unsuccessfully seeking to stabilise the industry, the poultrymen lost some of their unity, so it was decided to revert to the original name of Poultry Farmers' Organisation (PFO). The PFO ceased to exist from February 1937, and its members became members of the PPA, in the hopes that by joining the PPA, they could achieve their desired outcomes.



RIGHT: Primary Producers' Association President Sir John Teasdale 1932–1940

chapter five

Amalgamation

The divisive forces of the worldwide depression in the early 1930s had caused a split in the two farming organisations in Western Australia, the Primary Producers' Association (PPA) and the Wheat and Wool Growers' Union (WGU). However, even though the split was increasing during the 1930s, the idea of uniting into one union was discussed by leaders and gatherings of farmers. The WGU had attracted large numbers of farmers with some branches of the PPA even changing their allegiance to the WGU.

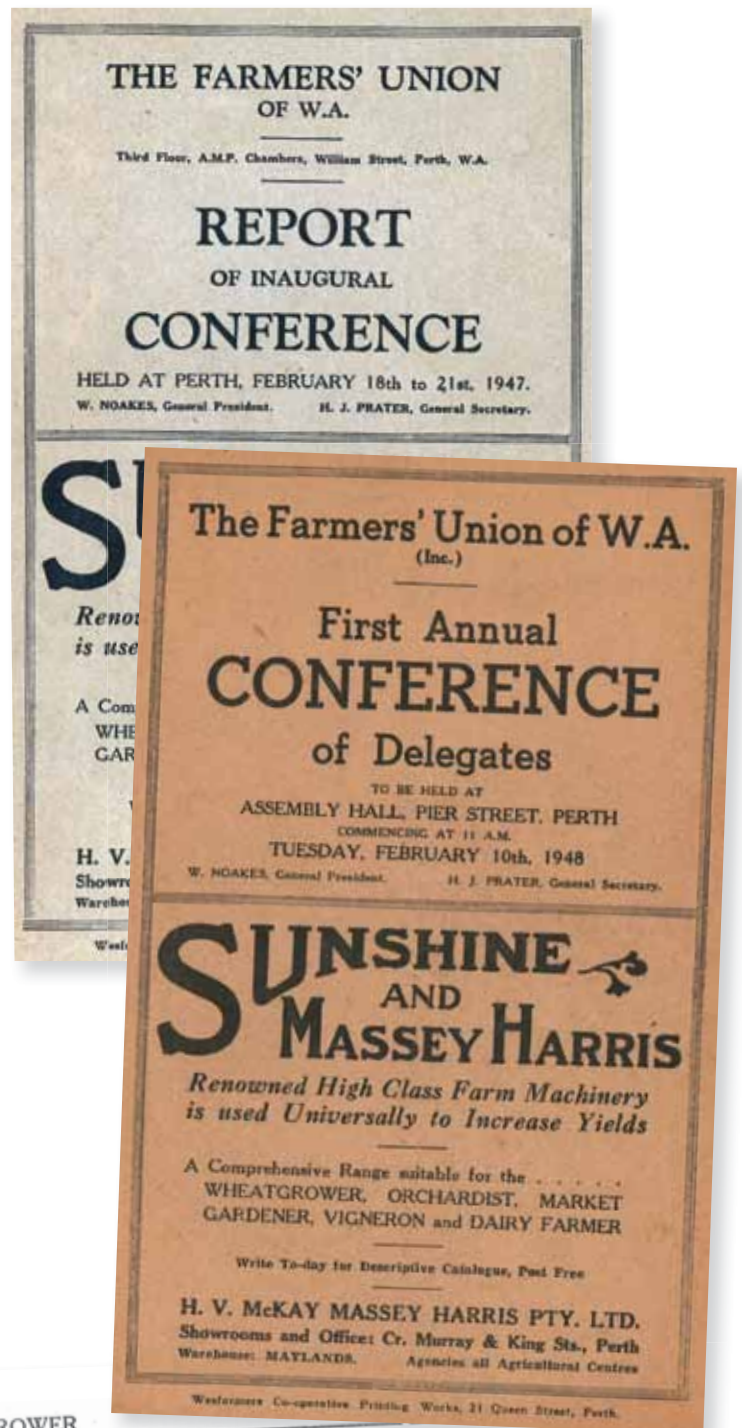
By the 1940s, the desire for unity resulted in negotiations and in 1943 a merger was proposed. It was not until June 1944, that the committees appointed by each of the two organisations met, to discuss the matter.

At the Annual Conference of the PPA, a report by the Association's committee was endorsed, and the incoming executive was authorised to bring about amalgamation. Discussions between the two organisations continued and in May 1945, the PPA executive referred the amalgamation issue to the Annual Conference. The conference decided to renew efforts to merge with the WGU. At the same time, the WGU Annual Conference agreed to a new joint committee, and on October 10, members of the joint committee decided to call a combined conference of delegates in February 1946. At that conference, the final decision to amalgamate under the name of the Farmers' Union was made.



ABOVE LEFT: Primary Producers' Association President Joseph Diver 1940–1946

ABOVE RIGHT: Farmers' Union of WA Inaugural President Walter Noakes 1947–1960



Perth, Thursday, September 7, 1944.

THE WHEATGROWER

Perth, Thursday, September 7, 1944.

W. & W.G.U. 15th Annual Conference

Constitutional Amendments

Membership Rights of Farm Women

Under Constitutional Amendments at the annual conference of the W. & W.G.U., Mr. J. S. O'Connell of Durandlin moved:

Mr. Schulze (Executive) said that if this were passed it would include any grower, his wife or children, which was pretty wide. There was

years of age and over be included in this motion."

Mr. Ingham (Bruce Rock) said that he would like to see included in the motion the words "only those members of the family who are residents on the farm."

Mr. Fevster (Baandee) said that the Constitution allowed anyone to join the Union except the man's wife.

Mr. Munday (Hyden) said that in a partnership only one man had a vote. He thought they should stick to the Constitution as it stood, other

Mr. Travers (D-La.) thought that wives should be delegated to vote on the husbands' behalf.

Mr. O'Connell (Durandville) said the sons were allowed to join at the present time.

and as the Constitution stood at the present time a member could nominate for a position on the Board, and if defeated was still a member of the Executive. If, however, the words "Nominates For" were inserted it would clarify the whole position. It showed an Executive member that once he nominated he ceased to be a member of the Executive.

Mr. Williams (Kukerin) seconded the motion.

Mr. Haddock (Moravia) said that the ruling of the President, which was upheld by Conference, was an alteration of the Constitution. Mr. Watson had given a ruling that a man should resign before he was nominated, and Mr.

sign before he nominated, and Mr Walker had disagreed with him. He thought that legal opinion should be taken on the matter.

Mr. Sandell moved, and Mr. Green (Pingelly) seconded that the motion be now put. This was carried.

ation could be tied up with the question of dissolution. Another point was that if they sought a dissolution on a straight out majority basis the chances were they would run counter to their constitutional procedure which required certain methods to be followed in order to alter the Constitution.

Mr. Taylor (Mingenew-Yandanooka)

Mr. Harris said he only wished to add the words "for amalgamation if

Mr. Taylor said that their committee of five had been told that the P.P.A. would bring in provision for the formation of the Conference desired.

amalgamation if the Conference desired it, and they (the committee) had said that they would also bring that in. It was following their promise

in. It was following their return to the P.P.A. that they had brought this forward, although it might be that they should be very careful before making an alteration of the Com-



TOP: Farmers' Union headquarters decorated on the occasion of the visit of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and HRH the Duke of Edinburgh to WA in 1954



ABOVE: Farmers' Union headquarters prior to the organisation's move to Primary Industry House

The joint committee met in August and completed matters essential to creating the Farmers' Union. The Union applied for incorporation and proceeded with the organisation of membership, branches and zones.

The first Annual Conference of the new Union was held on February 18, 1947. Walter Noakes was elected as the first President of the Union. Officers for the Wheat, Wool, Dairy and Barley Sections were also elected while the Whole Milk sub-section officials were elected afterwards.

Activities at Head Office increased and a new site was required. New offices were purchased on Adelaide Terrace and plans drawn up to renovate and extend to the existing buildings. The Union moved into the premises in March 1953 before the official opening in August.

In April 1954, the Union received a gift out of the will of Thomas Henry Peterson from Northam. Mr Petersen, who was a foundation member of the Cuballing branch of the Farmers and Settlers' Association, had left a portion of his estate to the Union, the value of which was approximately £100,000. The terms of the will, stated that the funds were for the building of new offices that would be suitable for the Union. The Union began to consider a proposal for the erection of modern premises on the Adelaide Terrace site.

BELOW: Inaugural conference 1947



chapter six

Farmers' Union to Primary Industries



After 14 years as the inaugural President of the Union, Mr Noakes was replaced by Grant McDonald as Union President in 1960. Throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s, the Union set about capitalising on its strong beginnings. Membership increased substantially following the amalgamation as farmers supported the new Union.

Laurie Forrester replaced Mr McDonald as Union President in 1966 until he was succeeded by Sir Basil Embry in 1971. Sir Basil had the intention of holding the position for two years. He believed that the problems he could not solve in two years, he would never be able to solve.

Tough times

The early 1970s were tough times for farmers. Quotas were used to restrict the supply of wheat, to maintain a price that at least covered the cost of production. The quotas forced broadacre farmers to grow alternative grains or expand their livestock or sheep operations, although wool prices were not much better.

The Federal Government, under the leadership of Gough Whitlam, did institute a reserve price scheme for wool in August 1974 with the intention to guarantee Australian wool growers a minimum price for their wool.

The Whitlam Government also removed the long-standing \$12 per tonne bounty on superphosphate. During a rally in Forrest Place in 1974, Prime Minister Whitlam ended up facing unhappy Western Australian farmers as he was

hit by thrown missiles while he attempted to address the crowd. The following week, the Tonkin-Labor Government lost power in Western Australia, which many see the Prime Minister's incitement of farmers during his Forrest Place address, as a catalyst for the change of Government. Prime Minister Whitlam was also later removed from office and his replacement, Liberal Malcolm Fraser, reinstated the superphosphate bounty.

New Executive

Sir Basil made a significant change in the structure of the organisation. Prior to his presidency, the Union was run by the General Section Council which contained approximately 50 members. Sir Basil made the move to establish an Executive of eight elected members and then those eight members would select another two to sit on the Council. Future Presidents Wolfe Boetcher, Winston Crane, Peter Lee and Kevin McMenemy were among the members of this committee which found their way onto the Executive through this selection process.

The new Executive structure meant that the Union moved from a reactive body to a more proactive one. The President was given more scope to make decisions and the Executive could make more timely decisions rather than waiting for the General Section Council, which sat four times a year.

Sir Donald Eckersley became Union President, replacing Sir Basil Embry in 1973 and was instrumental in the creation of a national farming body later in the decade. Sir Donald wanted unity in Australian agriculture and wanted each of

A Farmers' Union press release from December 1961



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Farmers' Union of WA Presidents: Grant McDonald (1960–1966), Laurie Forrester (1966–1971), Sir Basil Embry (1971–1973), Sir Don Eckersley (1973–1975), Wolfe Boetcher (1975–1982) and Primary Industries Association President: Winston Crane (1982–1989)



TOP: Primary Industry House

ABOVE: Inaugural NFF President and former Farmers' Union of WA President Sir Don Eckersley (signing document), was instrumental in the formation of the National Farmers' Federation

BELOW: In the single biggest turnout of farmers in WA, 7,000 farmers converged on the steps of WA Parliament House in April 1985 to protest about the unfair burden on farm costs



the state's farming organisations to unify into a national body. Sir Donald was very good at getting parties to find areas of agreement and often was able to get parties together to find these common areas.

Wolfe Boetcher replaced Sir Donald as Union President in 1975. Due to a reduction in membership and members not paying their subscriptions, Mr Boetcher moved a motion to dissolve the organisation. This threat had a profound effect resulting in subscriptions and memberships beginning to rise.

National unity

During Mr Boetcher's term, a national body for farmers, the National Farmers' Federation (NFF) was established in 1979 as Australia's farm leaders recognised the need for a unified body. With this unified position, it was felt that it was the most practical way of achieving real gains for farmers. Former Farmers' Union of WA President Sir Don Eckersley was elected the NFF's inaugural President.

Western Australia had significant influence on the NFF throughout the Boetcher, Crane and Lee years. Western Australia had two delegates on the NFF executive and a number of other Western Australians chaired a number of the different NFF committees.

Primary Industry House

There was change at the Farmers' Union headquarters with the redevelopment of the Adelaide Terrace site into Primary Industries House, which was led by President Boetcher with the support of the Executive. It was felt the site was being undercapitalised and by redeveloping the site, the Union could increase income through rental of office space in the building.

During Winston Crane's tenure as President, the building began to run into difficulty due to a downturn in the rental and leasing market, which led to tenants leaving the building. Mr Crane took the decision to rent out offices and floors of the building at cost. During this period the Association covered its costs in regard to the building.

After another downturn, several floors of tenants moved out of the building and the organisation was faced with some very difficult choices in regard to Primary Industry House.

In consultation with the bank, it was decided the building was to be sold. The organisation continued to operate out of the building until 2005 while the finances and debts were finalised.

Name change

In 1982, the Farmers' Union of WA changed its name to the Primary Industry Association (PIA), in an effort to distance itself from the union movement and to better reflect the membership base of primary producers. In the same year, Winston Crane succeeded Mr Boetcher as President and held the office until 1989.

As a legacy of previous presidents, Mr Crane continued working on industrial relations issues and in 1985, an

Australian Farmers' Fighting Fund was established through the NFF to provide financial, legal and professional assistance to farmers facing issues which had the potential to set legal precedents. The fund is still in existence today.

Mr Crane also struck an agreement with the President of the Pastoralists and Graziers' Association (PGA), Max Cameron in 1985. Both groups were fighting similar issues and a "Call to Government" was formalised.

The agreement demanded a fair go for farmers from governments and covered a range of issues including retaining the diesel fuel subsidy, more flexibility in the workplace, tariffs and other protection and changes to the taxation system.

Financial hardships

The PIA became involved in issues with farmers' deteriorating financial situations during the 1980s. A number of farmers had received inflated valuations on their properties and after a downturn in the prices of all commodities found themselves in financial difficulties. Due to the inflated nature of the valuations, many farmers had been allowed to borrow more than they should have and found difficulty servicing the loans. In some cases the loan was larger than the value of the property. The PIA took up the fight with the banks to ensure farms were not sold for less than their value and to improve the unstable conditions that had eventuated as a result of the inflated valuations.

BELOW: Winston Crane campaigning to retain the diesel fuel subsidy

BOTTOM: PGA President Max Cameron and PIA President Winston Crane signing the Call to Government agreement in 1985



TOP: Farmers voted without dissent to withhold payment of government taxes and charges unless they received a 'fair go' from government

ABOVE: Government charges and taxes had imposed \$350 million on WA farmers, equivalent to \$25,000 a farm

chapter seven

Western Australia Farmers Federation

The Association again went through a name change in 1987 when it became the Western Australian Farmers Federation (WAFF), to more closely align itself with National Farmers' Federation.

Peter Lee became President of the WAFF in 1989, while Mr Crane was elected as a Liberal Senator to Federal Parliament. Mr Lee inherited an organisation which was trying to reconcile the value of different income streams. At the time WAFF had its own newspaper, the *Farmers Weekly* and finance, insurance and real estate companies. None of these companies were very successful and at best covered their costs. Mr Lee closed down the finance, insurance and real estate companies and also took the decision to close down the Federation's newspaper.

It was decided the Federation was in the communications business and not the newspaper business and with three commercial weekly newspapers published every week plus the WAFF-funded newspaper; it was felt the funds spent on the newspaper could be better used in other areas. The name *Farmers Weekly* was not lost, with the masthead leased to the *Western Farmers and Grazier*.

During the Lee Presidency, the Federation took up a significant battle during the Wheat War between the USA and Europe. Due to the USA's dumping of subsidised wheat on the market through its export enhancement program, the price of wheat began to fall, not because of market factors, but politics. The Federation decided to take action and dumped grain out of the front of the US and British consuls in Perth. Mr Lee said the Federation was going to remove the dumped wheat, something that the USA could not do with the wheat it had dumped.

National Presidency

Mr Lee was also Junior Vice President of the NFF while he served as WAFF President. In 1991, Mr Lee ran for President of the NFF and was involved in a tug-of-war for the job with the NFF Senior Vice President Graham Blight. Mr Lee was defeated in the election, however he continued to serve as Senior Vice President under Mr Blight.

Senior Vice President Alex Campbell replaced Mr Lee as WAFF President in 1992.



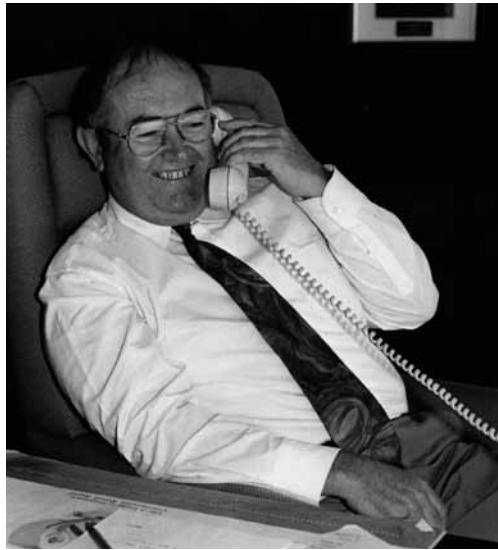
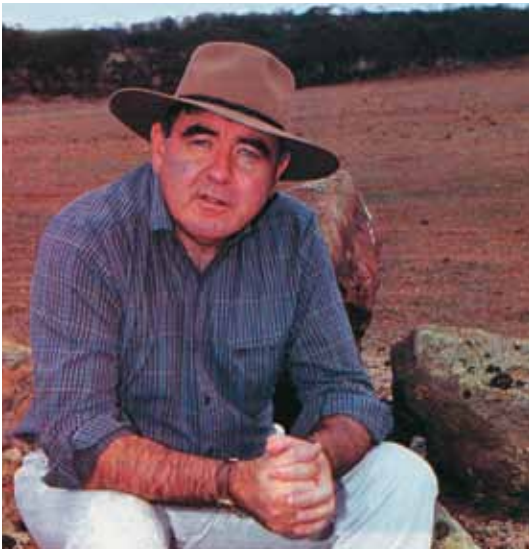
LEFT: Premier Brian Burke, Peter Lee and Julian Grill — press conference in the Premier's Department



BOTTOM LEFT: WAFF President Peter Lee with WA Agriculture Minister Ernie Bridge

BOTTOM RIGHT: Alex Campbell, Western Australian Farmers Federation President 1992–1995





ABOVE LEFT: WAFF President Peter Lee pictured in *The West Australian Magazine* in the lead up to the National Farmers' Federation Presidential election in May 1991

ABOVE RIGHT: Western Australian Farmers Federation President Kevin McMenemy 1995–2000

ABOVE FAR RIGHT: Colin Nicholl, WAFarmers President 2000–2004

Branches to zones

A significant restructure in WAFF's organisation occurred during the Campbell years with the dissolution of Branches and a focus on serving Zones.

There were very few branches operating and the trend was that each Zone had one strong Branch. The Branch system was a legacy of the past with a branch in each road board district. It was felt that WAFF could better service the Zones rather than Branches with support paid to Zone secretaries and Head Office staff able to attend more Zone meetings.

Farmers' issues

Farmers' land rights were also an issue and WAFF was able to negotiate with the Commonwealth Government to remove the equal title on pastoral land holdings. Had these titles been included in the Native Title Act, the legislation would have been more difficult for farmers to handle.

WAFF was also involved in the creation of Landcare through providing policy ideas to the Commonwealth Government.

The collapse of the Soviet Union, which was a major purchaser of Australian wool, had a large effect on wool exports. When the USSR dissolved, it could no longer afford to maintain imports of Australian wool, as a result, the wool market collapsed and the reserve price scheme was suspended after the stockpile reached 4.75 million bales. The Australian Government in consultation with industry agreed the scheme could no longer be maintained.

New leader

Beekeeping member Kevin McMenemy took over from Mr Campbell as President in 1995. Mr McMenemy said one of his major tasks during his term was finalising the transfer of the building. The final payment to the debenture trustees was made in November 1999.

Workplace safety became a major talking point during the 1990s and there was a review of Occupational Health and Safety Laws. Under some of the provisions of the reviewed laws, farmers were going to be much worse off. Mr McMenemy said WAFF fought very hard for nearly 100 changes and got all but 10 of them.

In the late 1990s, WAFF played a decisive role in the restructure of the statutory lamb marketing board. The creation of the West Australian Meat Marketing Cooperative (WAMMCO), which still exists today, was a fully producer-owned co-operative with an operational abattoir.

During Mr McMenemy's term as President, a motion was passed and written into the constitution that Presidents would be limited to two, two-year terms. When Colin Nicholl became President in 2000, he was the first President to serve under the maximum four-year tenure.

BELOW: WAFarmers President Colin Nicholl talks to Prime Minister John Howard



chapter eight

New name, new location

One of the biggest changes to the Australian grains industry was the demise of the single desk which was vehemently opposed by WAFarmers. The single desk grew out of the Australian Wheat Board (AWB) statutory authority which was set up in 1939 as a government-run and owned company before being privatised in 1999 to become AWB Limited.

Under the single desk arrangements, AWB had the monopoly right to export wheat in bulk through a national pooling system which provided net benefits to Australian growers. These benefits included AWB having a greater bargaining power on behalf of growers, by virtue of the volume of exports to maximise the net returns to National Pool participants, security of payments to Pool participants and AWB's role as the buyer of last resort for the whole crop. Despite opinion polls consistently showing more than 80 per cent of Australian wheat farmers supported the single desk, it was abolished in June 2008 and Australia eventually lost ownership of the iconic AWB when the company accepted a takeover bid from Canadian company Agrium, in 2010.

Strategic changes

A strategic rebranding saw the organisation refer to itself as WAFarmers and the Marketing and Communications team won national and international communications awards for their efforts in the communications area. WAFarmers was also voted the third most influential Western Australian lobby group.

WAFarmers took a major step forward in corporate governance by setting up a Board of management with outside expertise members in 2001. An interim Board was established in November 2001, before the 2002 Annual Conference ratified the Board structure. Members were still in control of electing Board members. However two special expertise members would be selected by the Board to complement the elected members.

Grain freight and drought

Mr Nicholl paid particular attention during his time as President to issues with grain freight among other things. Mr Nicholl, himself a grain farmer from Hyden, was annoyed he was paying 20 per cent of his grain production income in rail freight costs each year to the State Government. During this period, WAFarmers helped to set up the Grains Logistics Committee which created one of the best grain handling systems in the world.

Along with CBH, WAFarmers was also instrumental in the installation of rapid loading facilities and block train facilities. However, a decision to privatise the rail system led to the rail being on-sold, hence the effectiveness of the system began to diminish. WAFarmers opposed the privatisation of the rail lines fearing exactly what eventuated.

In 2001, farmers faced the largest drought since 1914 and WAFarmers fought for Exceptional Circumstances declaration

for farmers who suffered during this drought. A day of action in Katanning and another the following day in Albany coincided with a visit from Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson. Many farmers opened their books to Mr Anderson to show the devastating effect the drought had on their farm businesses. A Drought Relief Fund initiated by WAFarmers, and assisted by the St Vincent de Paul Society, raised \$600,000 while the Swan Brewery also ran a promotion to help farmers who were struggling with the drought.

WAFarmers opposed and initially won the fight against Labor Attorney-General Jim McGinty's one-vote, one-value legislation. However, this legislation was subsequently passed, later following another election.

In 2002, WAFarmers ceased its membership with the National Farmers' Federation.

Membership of the NFF was based on gross value of production for the entire state and WAFarmers had to pay for production that it did not represent.

After holding the position of Senior Vice President under Mr Nicholl, Trevor De Landgraft became President of WAFarmers in 2004 after Mr Nicholl had served the maximum four years as President.

Young farmers

During his first year in charge, Mr De Landgraft created a Young Farmers Section. Previously there had been no connection between WAFarmers and rural youth and the new section aimed to get young farmers involved in the different commodity councils. It required a constitutional change which saw a Young Farmers Section delegate sit on each of the commodity councils including General Section Council.

2004 also saw a devastating tsunami strike areas of Indonesia, Sri Lanka and other countries in South East Asia. WAFarmers, with the support of CBH, set up a grain donation fund to support the victims of the tsunami. CBH was able to sell the grain from this fund and the money was spent on food supplies which were delivered to Aceh in Indonesia, one of the areas heavily affected.

BELOW: WAFarmers President Trevor de Landgraft discusses the Iraq wheat debt issue with Prime Minister John Howard





TOP: WAFarmers members protest against the Federal Government's decision to forgive Iraq's \$600 million wheat debt

ABOVE LEFT: WAFarmers President Trevor De Landgraft 2004–2008
 ABOVE RIGHT: WAFarmers President Mike Norton, 2008–2012

In 2004, the Federal Government announced that Australia would forgive Iraq's \$600 million debt for wheat shipments made before 1990. Taxpayers funded \$500 million while wheat growers were asked to write off the other \$100 million. WAFarmers ran a "wheat bag campaign" directed at the Federal Government. The campaign saw small bags of wheat marked with "IRAQ DEBT" and one of the bags was given to Prime Minister John Howard during a visit to Perth. WAFarmers pursued the Federal Government to cover the payments for farmers. However, farmers never received the full payment and on average it was estimated that each Western Australian wheat grower lost around \$10,000, which was a lot higher than growers in other states.

New location

WAFarmers relocated to its current Burswood premises in 2005. The move from Primary Industry House was a difficult time for the organisation. Previous Executives had made the bold decision to build a large premise in Adelaide Terrace and due to economic downturns and issues discussed earlier, the building had to be sold. Currently the trustees are in the last stages of finalising the debentures for presentation to the Supreme Court to have the remaining outside funds transferred to the Petersen Trust. The trust was established for property development and the funds cannot be used for the day-to-day running of the organisation.

Good neighbours, GM and drought

Farmers were having issues with the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM). CALM's biggest neighbour is farmers and as such there is a reliance on farmers to assist when bushfires occurred. Farmers had become agitated with several CALM directives and threatened to fight fires on their properties but would not fight them once they crossed onto CALM land. WAFarmers and CALM combined to develop a Good Neighbour Policy which endeavoured to bring some commonsense to the relationship between farmers and CALM.

The introduction of Genetically Modified crops presented a challenge for WAFarmers with different views across the membership.

It was decided to hold an annual policy forum to coincide with the General Section Council meeting in February, to discuss GM matters and invited speakers with special expertise on GM from both sides to present and Zone representatives at General Section Council could then debate and develop informed policy.

Farmers again faced a number of tough seasons due to drought during the De Landgraft presidency. In the North East grain belt there was sustained drought and WAFarmers lobbied the State Government for Exceptional Circumstances funding for farmers. Labor Agriculture Minister Kim Chance visited the areas and announced the funding. Funding was a relief for farmers but it also helped a number of farmers access interest rate subsidies. The Exceptional Circumstances scheme has since been replaced by a Drought Pilot Program.

Norton becomes President

After serving a long apprenticeship within WAFarmers and the Cattle Council of Australia, including being WAFarmers Meat Section President, Capel meat and dairy farmer Mike Norton became President in 2008, after Mr De Landgraft served the maximum four years as President. Mr De Landgraft remains involved with WAFarmers as a current Board Member.

During his four years as President, like many of his predecessors, Mr Norton, has watched over great change both internally and externally.

The funding of the organisation was a major issue for Mr Norton to look after as President. Bigger farms meant less farmers and WAFarmers needed to find other ways to fund its operations. A partnership with Emerald, in the form of the WAFarmers Grain Pools managed by Emerald, has provided extra funds to the organisation to help finance its various activities. Deregulation of the fertiliser industry also opened the door to a partnership with New Zealand-owned fertiliser company Ravensdown.

National representation

National representation was also a key focus for Mr Norton during his Presidency. Since he became President, WAFarmers has continued its membership of the Cattle Council of Australia and Australian Dairy Farmers, and after a seven-year absence, it rejoined the National Farmers' Federation in 2009. WAFarmers has been working hard on establishing national representation for the grain industry and during its centenary year has helped to establish a national representative grain forum with GrainGrowers Ltd and the NFF.

Farmers also faced difficult weather conditions with frost in 2009 crippling incomes while drought in 2010 made things even worse. WAFarmers, along with industry groups, helped to lobby State and Federal Governments to set up the Drought Pilot Program in 2011.

chapter nine

The final word

Where would farmers be without WAFarmers?

"Without the WA Farmers Federation, there is no doubt in my mind that as a group of people, farmers would be far worse off. We would be a disorganised rabble, squabbling most of the time between ourselves and trying to compete with ourselves over silly things,"

Winston Crane Primary Industry Association/WAFF President 1982–1989

"I think we'd all get taken to the cleaners even more if we operated individually,"

Alex Campbell WAFF President 1992–1995

"Farmers would be a damn sight worse off than they are today if not for WAFarmers. When you go back and look at some of the things WAFarmers have done, farmers have a lot to be grateful for. I think there would have been a lot of things that farmers would have been facing today that the existence of WAFarmers made sure they didn't."

Kevin McMenemy WAFF President 1995–2000

What does the future hold for WAFarmers?

"It is essential that WAFarmers continues in its current role as a lobby group. We are without doubt the biggest and the best within Western Australia. The more resources WAFarmers has, the better we can do our job,"

Colin Nicholl WAFarmers President 2000–2004

"There is a tremendous future for agriculture in this country. You have to have a lobby group to go out and do the things that you really need to do, to protect farmers and agriculturalists. WAFarmers has had some tremendous wins in the past and farmers will always need a lobby group like the State Farming Organisations linked to the National Farmers' Federation, to look after and protect their rights and assets."

You need a dynamic, well-connected group like the State Farming Organisation structure to protect your rights and build agriculture to cover food production and security for your domestic and international population."

Mike Norton WAFarmers President 2008–2012



TOP: Mike Norton speaking at the launch of the WA Drought Reform program in 2010

ABOVE: Mike Norton with members of the Wheatbelt Railway Retention Alliance



ABOVE: Incoming president Dale Park of Badgingarra with immediate past president Mike Norton

WAFarmers' Supporters

Every WAFarmers' member receives a FarmCard as part of their annual membership, which entitles you to exclusive, genuine discounts on a range of products and services that will save your business money. Please visit the WAFarmers' website, wafarmers.org.au, for the latest details.

WAFARMERS' FARMCARD SUPPORTERS



CORPORATE SUPPORTERS



CENTENARY CONFERENCE 2012 SPONSORS





The Western Australian Farmers Federation Inc.

Ground floor
28 Thorogood Street
Burswood, Western Australia, 6100

T (08) 9486 2100
F (08) 9361 3544
E wafarmers@wafarmers.org.au

wafarmers.org.au

Member of

