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**Professor Derek Edward Tribe AO OBE**

**John E. Vercoe**

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# Professor Derek Edward Tribe AO OBE

AGRICULTURAL SCIENTIST

JOHN E. VERCOE

The conference in 2003 was held in the shadow of Derek's passing on 19 April 2003. We dedicate these proceedings to his memory.

Derek Tribe was a champion of agricultural research in Australia and internationally.

Derek, with his wife Elizabeth and their family, started his life in Australia as a Reader in Animal Physiology and Production at the School of Agriculture at the University of Melbourne in 1956, the last year of the reign of Sir Samuel Wadham. Derek was recruited from the University of Bristol, where he lectured after having completed his undergraduate degree in agriculture at the University of Reading and his PhD at the Rowett Research Institute in Aberdeen, Scotland.

He came like a breath of fresh air into the Melbourne University School of Agriculture, rapidly acquiring and nurturing postgraduate students in a range of scientific areas, obtaining substantial research grants, creating animal houses from old disused sheds, and, above all giving the students the feeling that they mattered and that they were the future of agriculture in Australia. He readily shared his academic and professional visitors with the postgraduate students both socially and professionally, and he encouraged their participation in learned conferences and societies. He made sure his students met the right people and formed their networks of future contacts early in their careers. Above all, he built their confidence through words of praise and encouragement and strengthened their belief and trust in science and the scientific community. He made sure that postgraduate students received credit for their work and always took pleasure in their successes. He never took unwarranted credit for the work of others. His leadership of groundbreaking work in urea feeding for ruminants, vitamin synthesis in the rumen,

trace elements in poultry nutrition, feed utilisation, not to mention marsupial growth and body composition and numerous other initiatives, was truly remarkable. He was a person of boundless energy, enthusiasm and resourcefulness. Among his greatest gifts was his ability to enthuse those around him, using his warm sense of humour to great effect.

After a few years in Australia, a return visit to Britain prompted him and Elizabeth to write a book entitled 'Postmark Australia'. This was an introduction to life in Australia told in the form of correspondence between some new arrivals and those they had left behind in the UK. It was squarely aimed at answering the queries of the many British academic and scientific migrants who were attracted to Australia at that time. This was only one of a number of joint projects with Elizabeth, another notable one being a 'Letter to Nature' on the behaviour of sheep eating seaweed on a Scottish Isle, allegedly written on their honeymoon! Such was the enthusiasm and creative energy of Derek Tribe.

Derek was Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry at the time it was at its peak. He had recruited staff in a variety of new disciplines, expanded horizons and courses, undertaken building programs, fostered new alliances and led the School when it was arguably the best in Australia. Certainly the activities in his own specialty, animal science, were internationally acclaimed and his postgraduate students were much sought after.

During this time he was also rapidly gaining recognition for his work in international agricultural

research and its potential impact on economic development. This became his passion and lifelong interest and resulted in many of his greatest achievements. He was the impetus behind the establishment of the then highly innovative International Livestock Centre for Africa, now the International Livestock Research Institute, in Ethiopia, in the early 1970s. He conceived it, planned it and captured the interest of the international agricultural research community through the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research in Washington, who funded it.

He formed a strong bond and friendship with the internationally respected Australian agricultural economist, Sir John Crawford. They shared similar values and ideals, and ideas on the role of international agricultural research in alleviating poverty and generating food security, seeing it as one of the primary means that would lead to greater equality and contribute to a better world for all.

Derek Tribe served for several years as the Director of the International Development Program, a program run by the Australian Universities Vice-Chancellors Committee, where he left his mark as a powerful advocate for Australia's role in the international training of scientists from developing countries. He helped many Australian universities make lasting linkages to Asia, and he himself made many personal friends.

Derek played a significant role in the establishment of the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering, of which he was a Foundation Fellow and later an Honorary Fellow. He was a long-serving member of Council and particularly active in arranging the annual Symposia. He was also one of the people who, with Sir John Crawford, were instrumental in establishing the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research. Both these institutions are greatly indebted to Derek Tribe for his vision, his advocacy and his energy.

His crowning achievement for many came towards the end of his very active career — the birth of the Crawford Fund, named after Sir John Crawford. It encapsulates in many ways all that Derek stood and strived for throughout his life in terms of international assistance. It is small but influen-

tial, it adds value to and catalyses activities and interest in international agricultural research among its partners in Australia and in developing countries, it increases the impact of larger-scale agricultural projects through its work in technical training, and it brings together Australian and developing country scientists for mutual benefit. In recognition of his contribution the Crawford Fund established the 'Derek Tribe Award' which is made biennially to a citizen of a developing country for their distinguished contribution to their application of agricultural research.

Derek was a true visionary. But unlike many visionaries Derek had the great gift of being able to make his visions become reality. He was extremely eloquent and although he was a naturally talented orator, he was always meticulously rehearsed for the big occasions, especially where it was imperative to the success of a vision for him to convince those who mattered of its merit and benefits. Derek's keen mind would quickly go beyond the logical analysis of issues to formulate plans of action, actions that would transform the vision into a successfully operating product, whether that product was an institution, a dynamic research group, an informative conference, or a new course of study or teaching method. He had the 'art of the possible' as well as the 'art of the soluble'.

Derek Tribe's achievements were recognised by his peers and the community. He was the recipient of many honours and awards, including an OBE and an AO, fellowships from professional and learned societies and honorary degrees from several universities.

Derek's life could be summed up in the words of the title of one of his many books — 'Doing well by doing good'. Derek did well and he did good. He will be greatly missed by his many friends and by his loving wife, Elizabeth, his children Jonathan, Andrew and Jane, and his grandchildren.

Born Portsmouth, England, 23 September  
1926

Died Melbourne, 19 April 2003