

Obituary of James Hill, EO of the Australian Red Breed 2001-09, written by John Williams

James Andrew Hill was an outstanding contributor to any of the agricultural, cattle breeding or agri-political pursuits with which he identified. He has been described "as a prince among men" by one of his many good friends, Doctor Les Hansen, Professor of Animal Science, Minnesota University, USA. This description is very fitting, as indeed he was pre-eminent in any field in which he chose to work.

James was born on 27th September, 1949. His childhood was spent on the family farming property at Moss Vale, a small town surrounded by mountains and forests on the south eastern slopes of the Great Dividing Range in New South Wales. In his youth, he was a talented sportsman, particularly playing hockey, basketball and rugby. For a short period James even coached a local netball team and apparently had no problems finding enough young ladies to fill the team, as well as any number of reserve players - how ingenious!

An accomplished horseman, he rode the trails in the forest around the farm and a shared love of horses brought him into contact with his future wife, Christine, who he married in 1972. James was passionate about his family; Christine and children Emma and David and he always retained a passion for his Red cows.

James was a successful dairy farmer, stud cattle breeder and showman - initially of Australian Illawarra Shorthorns and subsequently moving to the Australian Red Dairy Breed. Following completion of his education at Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, New South Wales, James returned to the family property at Moss Vale and managed both the dairy and a beef cattle enterprise for 12 years. In 1981, James and Christine purchased an irrigated farming property at Wagga Wagga and established a stud dairy enterprise there under the prefix "Tarella". Taking the opportunity initiated by Bill Thompson, James joined the fledgling Australian Red Breed Register (ARDB, as it was known then) in 1985.

He began introducing into his own herd, the vastly superior Red Dairy genetics that had become available from the Nordic Countries' Red Dairy cattle populations, in Sweden, Denmark and Norway. He also joined a syndicate of farmers to purchase a high projected index young bull from the German Red Angler Breed, located in Schleswig-Holstein, Germany's most northern state bordering the Baltic Sea. This bull (Angler King) was collected at Avoncroft Artificial Breeding Centre in England and its semen sent to Australia. The inclusion of imported genetics into his herd, particularly from Swedish breeding organisation Svensk Avel, led to a major profitable upgrade of the original Illawarra herd. In due course, James made the acquaintance of Goran Malmberg (Svensk Avel) and credited Goran with having a major role in setting the direction the breed has taken.

True to his commitment, James served as an active contributor on any number of sub committees or tasks he undertook to address. In 2001, James was elected as Executive Officer of the ARDB, succeeding inaugural EO Pat Swasbrick. Following dairy industry deregulation in 2000, the Tarella herd was dispersed and the property was sold in 2002 when the family moved to Canberra. Fortunately, while James no longer farmed, he chose to continue his association with the Breed and retained the EO position.

During my tenure as President of the ARDB (or Aussie Reds for short), I had the privilege to work with James in his role as Executive Officer of the Breed and we developed a close working relationship and became good friends

By any measure, he has been a most effective, visionary and capable Executive Officer of the ARDB. James was acknowledged by his peers as a leader in his field, both on a national scale in Australia and internationally.

In 1995, James was elected to the executive committee of the Australian Registered Cattle Breeders Association (ARCBA) and in 2001 was elected as one of two vice presidents. (In brief, for a small annual fee per member (A\$4.40), ARCBA represents the interests of the registered cattle breeds, beef and dairy in the agri-political, export accreditation, protocols, lobbying and liaising with relevant Government and quarantine authorities ect. The area of expertise so needed by the seed stock industry, but not adequately addressed by individual breeds with shrinking revenues and mounting work loads.) This affiliation saw James represent ARCBA from 1997, as a delegate to the advisory committee of the Australian Dairy Herd Improvement Scheme (ADHIS). ADHIS is the dairy industry body holding the data base for all herd tested cows in Australia and calculates the Merit of bulls in the system via the Australian Profit Ranking (APR) and the Australian Selection Index (ASI). It also registers imported bulls and calculates an Australian Breeding Value Imported (ABV i) on those bulls until they have enough daughters in Australian herds to give a proof of high reliability earned in Australia. The Merit Index calculated in the Nordic Countries of a bull included not only production and type traits, but also health traits: mastitis resistance, daughter fertility, disease resistance (ketosis, retained placenta ect.) calving ease: sire and grandsire effect.

Initially, the mention of including these traits of low heritability in an Australian Index was treated with scepticism. James earned the nick name, "health traits Hill" for his insistence in pushing this argument. How times have changed, 13 years after he first raised the issue, those non production but profitable traits have seen increasing numbers of informed farmers seeking that sort of information as part of their breeding decisions. Farmer driven change is seeing increasing numbers of artificial breeding organisations talking about "health traits" and bulls daughters are starting to be assessed for those traits.

The contribution James made to the dairy industry, to the ARDB and the farmers' interests he represented was enormous. A brief summary cannot do him the justice he so richly deserves, but I will include some of the achievements.

- NSW Dairy Farmers Association
 - Chairman of Wagga Wagga District for eight years from 1991 and Central Council representative for the same period of time.
- NSW Dairy Industry Development Co. (DIDCO)
 - Foundation Executive member.
 - Chair, business focus steering and implementation committee (four years).
 - Advisory committee, genetic merit and pasture based farming, headed by Dr. W. Fulkerson, Wollongbar Agricultural Research Station.
 - Co-ordination and delivery of Dairy Decision Model to farmers following dairy deregulation.
- Charles Sturt University
 - 1998-2003, Chair of Directors, Charles Sturt Services Ltd.
 - 1996-2002, Director, Farm Management Committee - 300 cow dairy enterprise and pasture based management systems

- Australian Red Dairy Breed (ARDB)
 - Delegate to IRCC Conference Sweden 1995. Wrote and delivered the Australian National report.
 - Invited to judge Red Dairy Classes at Royal Show, Natal, South Africa 2001.
 - Arranged for imports of ARDB proven bull semen to South Africa.
 - Study Tour to China 2002 organised by Yossica Dairy Group. Presentations Red Dairycow opportunities, pasture based feeding systems.
 - Christchurch, New Zealand, 2003; opportunities for co-operation between Aussie Reds and NZ Dairy Shorthorns.
 - Svensk Avel sponsored trip to California, 2005; three-way crossbreeding trials. Presentation of ARDB position and reports.
 - Delegate to IRCC conference South Africa 2005. Wrote and delivered the Australian National Report.
 - Delegate to IRCC conference Sweden 2007. Wrote and delivered Australian National Report. Farm visits - organic production systems.

Following the move to Canberra, James was appointed to the position as Agriculture and Property Manager for "Landtasia Organic Foods Pty Ltd" (www.landtasia.com.au). Located on 10500 acres, the property Landtasia Ranch and Sanctuary is situated near Bungendore in the southern tablelands of New South Wales, about an hours drive to the east of Canberra. The property was founded by Richard Graham in 2001 with the aim to become an exemplary organic mixed agricultural enterprise. The property is managed according to organic food agricultural principles and is certified by Biological Farmers Australia (BFA) as a Certified Organic property in conversion. (After I visited the property in October 2008 I can understand why James enjoyed his role at Landtasia so much - especially when his two favourite RED Brahmin cows left the mob to say hello to him!)

Organic farming principles and their application is not a new phenomenon in Europe or the Nordic Countries. The opportunity presented itself post 2007 International Red Cow Conference for James to visit some European farms and other enterprises operating on organic principles. His position in the Aussie Reds saw him form many associations and friendships with a diverse range of people and this network extended to organic farming, so James took up the opportunity to visit a great friend of ours - the enterprising Bjarne Pedersen. Bjarne operates a certified organic property called Grambogard, near Odense in Denmark. The property's activities involved several agricultural enterprises on the Island of Funen - including a four robot, 280 cow dairy. (Incidentally, one of the best herds of Red dairy cows we have seen.) There were any number of issues and opportunities common to both Landtasia and Grambogard and James learnt much from his visit. The favour was returned when in December 2008 on a short visit to Australia Bjarne met James in Canberra and saw the Landtasia property himself.

James Andrew Hill leaves a lasting legacy within the ARDB. The position the breed has reached and the due respect it now commands within the Australian dairy industry has been achieved in a large part due to the commitment and contribution James has made over the years. James stood out as having the ability to articulate his message to any audience, be he presenting one-on-one, on-farm or to a large international audience at a world conference. He advocated strategic alliances of the Red Dairy populations from as many countries as possible. He did not suffer fools and, dealing in facts, could hold his own in any debate I witnessed. An outstanding quality was his ability to debate the issue and not personalise the

discussion. So many people I have observed resort to personal comments when they realise they are out of a logical explanation.

James worked with families to help them make a decent living from their cows and to recognise that the Aussie Reds, together with their international parent breeds and affiliates, have the answer to most of the issues that plague many of the major dairy breeds today. The rigorous breeding and bull selection programs applied by the Nordic Countries for the past 30 years have included those non production traits that impact on profitability in their proofs. Larger numbers of females in the daughter groups of a first proof has increased the reliability of those traits of lower heritability, enabling a breeding index to include them.

James commented that members of a dominant breed know very little or in many cases nothing about the lesser breeds, where as members of the lesser breeds know a lot about the dominant breeds – which is still applicable today. Unfortunately, high maintenance cows, infertility, assisted calvings (close to 100% in some big herds), tubing all new born calves with stored colostrum because the dams have lost the mother instinct or their first milk no longer has the anti bodies required, have become accepted dairying practice in many parts of the World. Farmers are busy enough as it is, without that extra burden!

James recognised the value of the IRCC and was a strong advocate for using this body to expand membership and strengthen ties between existing members. For instance we are well on the way to establishing a reciprocal progeny testing program with the German Red Angler Breed. Despite the diverse nature of dairy farming, from total grass based to total mixed ration (TMR) and many different feeding regimes in between, the goal is to breed profitable, low maintenance Red cows - with both the productive and physical attributes to stay in the herd for many years.

It takes wisdom and a lot of courage to step outside ones comfort zone. What some will see as an opportunity with a measured degree of risk, detractors will take comfort from the trials and failures encountered by the visionaries. As one of the pioneers and visionaries of our Breed, James took his share of criticism, especially when he made the choice to embrace the breeding ideas of the Nordic Countries. He was the one who said “if the production or conformation of the cow is lacking, then if we call ourselves cattle breeders, we have the information and must use it to correct the faults”.

James was the optimist who said “the half glass of water is half full”. Detractors would say the half glass of water is half empty and it's someone else's fault! I do recall a moment however, in South Africa, at the IRCC Conference in 2005. As is the custom after the end of the day's proceedings, a large group of participants were seated around a table in the bar at the venue, discussing "the meaning of life" as you do, (related to Red cows of course!) It was my turn to buy the round of drinks and we had been sampling some very good South African red wines. I poured the last of the bottle into several glasses and made the comment: “Hill, your glass is half full; you don't need a top up!” “Williams,” he replied, “can't you see, that glass is half empty!” Needless to say our international audience burst out laughing!

In July 2008, Monica (my wife) and I were invited to the annual general meeting of the European Red Dairy Breed in Tallin, Estonia. We gave a presentation on the ARDB and its current status and planned future. James had major input into the content of this presentation and after the meeting it was wonderful that so many people asked after James. He certainly had that rare ability to make people feel

relaxed and comfortable in his presence and left a lasting impression on those he met.

I have taken the liberty of completing this obituary by including some lines from a most amazing, wonderful and heart felt eulogy presented at the funeral by Richard Graham, owner of Landtasia Ranch.

"I have only known James for about five years. During that time I grew to respect him as a very able and confident farmer who helped me develop my own farm. I also knew James as a thinking man, who didn't seem so proud of what he already knew that he wasn't willing to continuously learn and take on board new ideas to solve old problems or set new standards. James did live a life worthy of our celebration and while it has finished much sooner than we would have wanted, James lives on in our memories, our deeds and our hearts".

How appropriate.