



WORKING MEN and their MACHINES

*A history of the
Farm Machinery Dealers Association of WA
1978-2013*

- KEN WILSON -



This Sunshine Auto header was the world's first self-propelled header. It was designed in Australia by Headlie S Taylor and built by H V McKay of Sunshine, Victoria in 1924. A machine similar to this one set a world harvesting record in 1938 of 3300 bushels from 76 acres in one day.

© 2014

Credits

Compiled and designed by Harvest Marketing and Publishing Pty Ltd.

The FMDA and FMIA acknowledge the assistance of Farm Weekly newspaper in providing some archival items, which appear in this publication.

FMDA: In the beginning

In 1968, New Holland chief Jack Scott held the first national machinery dealer meeting to discuss where the industry was heading. At that meeting Sandy met Trayning Chamberlain and New Holland dealer John Lynn and became firm friends.

They also attended a New Holland-sponsored motivation seminar in Perth two years later and were the only New Holland dealer principals to attend.

Following the seminar, which left them brimming with positivity and ideas, they continued to talk about the future of the ag industry, over the years particularly as it related to machinery dealers.

Inevitably the subject of a dealer body was discussed and while the pair saw difficulties attracting dealers with different franchises, including jealousies, they persevered.

The minutes of a meeting at Parliament House on May 31, 1977 at 2pm, are enlightening:

Present: Don Hosken, Alan Parsons, Colin Manly, Ian Bolto, Tom James, Peter Staines, Max Carson, John Lynn. Also present were Hon C Masters, MLC, R F Williams, MLA and A A Lewis, MLC.

Sandy Lewis opened the meeting and said he felt that the meeting should consider the formation of a Farm Machinery Dealers Association.

It was moved J Lynn, seconded I Bolto that an association be formed.

It was agreed membership should be open to any dealer of franchised farm machinery. The minutes also note: "Aims and objectives are to be worked out as we proceed but in the main range around the theme of bettering the areas we live in and the areas we work in."

It was suggested the next meeting be at El Caballo Blanco (Woorooloo) on Wednesday, June 22 starting at 10.30am.



It also was mentioned that subs of \$50 per firm should be suggested. In typical Sandy style, he invited the then Leader of the Senate Reg Withers, Deputy Premier Des O'Neill and MLA Tony Williams top the inaugural meeting. All machinery dealers were invited and a total of 56 attended, described in the then Elders Weekly as 56 of the State's major dealers.

MINUTES OF THE INAUGURAL MEETING OF THE FARM MACHINERY DEALERS' ASSOCIATION OF WA

After a short opening speech by Mr R G Williams, MLA, Member for Clontarf, it was moved by E Hotker and seconded by G Meyers, that the Farm Machinery Dealers' Association of WA be formed.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

President: J Lynn (Nominated, A A Lewis. Seconded, I Bolto). ELECTED.

Vice Presidents: D Hosken (Moved, M Taswell. Seconded, S Moppett); I Bolto (Moved, C Manley. Seconded, T James). ELECTED.

Secretary/Treasurer: A A Lewis (Moved, T James. Seconded, J Coote). ELECTED.

Discussion then ensued on the areas from which the committee should come. The following zones were set out:

Southern: Below a line through Waroona, Pingelly, Kulin, Kondinin, Hyden to Esperance.

Central: Above the line mentioned for Southern and below a line through Northam, Wyalkatchem, Koorda, Beacon to Kalgoorlie.

Northern: The rest of the State.

It was then moved by Mr Hotker and seconded by Mr B Mann that one committeeman be elected before lunch for each zone and one after lunch. CARRIED.

The subsequent committee comprised:

Southern: A Parsons, T Ratten.

Central: M Carson, G Humphries.

Northern: J Jolly, G Bunney.

Discussion was then had on how often elections should be held and it was moved C Jolly, seconded G Meyers:

"That the president, two Vice Presidents and Secretary-Treasurer, be elected annually.

"That Committee members elected in the morning, ie, Parsons, Carson and John Jolly, are elected for two years.

"That Committee members elected in the afternoon, ie, T Ratten, G Humphries and G Bunning, are elected for one year. Their future election would be for a two year term." CARRIED.

The Committee agreed to send out a questionnaire on aims and objectives.
J Thatcher, Elders Weekly, offered Public Relations.
Discussion was held on:
IAC hearing of SP headers. Secretary to make inquiries.
The value of investment allowance and would it be useful for second-hand machines.
Price guide – Committee to study matter.
Advertising and large contracts – Committee to study.
Cost of fuel in country – Committee to study.
Housing in country areas, tax concessions on cap[ital outlay. Committee to meet with
Minister to ensure more money for employer guaranteed housing.
Dealer Trade Plates.
Transport of machines by various methods.
Parts supplies.
Margins.
Moves Mr James and seconded Mr Hootker that we approach a PR firm on a contract
basis.
This was made a recommendation to the Committee and then passed.
It was also passed that the Committee get a logo or emblem.
Meeting closed 4.45pm.
The main topic at the meeting was the need for a unified body to stop manufacturers
riding roughshod over dealers.
As Sandy recalls: “The manufacturers’ reps had less knowledge about their products
than the dealers, and basically, the unspoken direction by manufacturers to dealers
was, do what you’re told by us.”
That attitude didn’t go down well with the highly successful businessmen who agreed
to form the FMDA.
Because Sandy was still a dealer, he received help with the secretarial duties from John
Lynn’s daughter Leonie Chidlow, for the first 12 months.
Through the efforts of Sandy, the FMDA was responsible for a conference in 1979
which was held at the Claremont Showgrounds and attracted many farm machinery
dealers from the Eastern States.



John Lynn - Larger than life

The inaugural president of the FMDA, John Lynn, was an imposing presence in agriculture right from his early days.

Trading as J and A (John and Audrey, his wife) Lynn, in a tin shed at Yelbeni, he quickly established a reputation as a gregarious character.

He loved life and quickly built solid friendships in the community as he focused on a business that would see him become the largest Chamberlain dealer in

WA.

One year, he ordered 21 Super 70 and 9G Chamberlain tractors which all arrived in one train-load at the Yelbeni siding and to this day stands as a record single shipment of tractors to one dealer.

Such was his business acumen and sales skills, he moved to Trayning, trading as the Lynn Service Group and set up branches at Mukinbudin and Bencubbin with a workshop at and Nungarin.

He was a top sportsman and represented WA in hockey while playing cricket, golf, tennis and football at Yelbeni and Trayning.

His laughed loud and he loved dancing, with his imposing frame (6ft 2in and about 17 stone) hard to miss.

He also had a big heart and in those days, the local Trayning Josephite nuns would regularly visit him and always leave with a cheque.

His then wife Audrey, who has remarried as Audrey Bancroft, recalled his generosity to the nuns and their deep appreciation for his help.

"His generosity extended to all sporting clubs and he could always be counted on as a sponsor," Audrey said.

In earlier life, John graduated (not that he actually graduated) from the University of WA and worked with Wesfarmers before moving to Yelbeni with his wife Audrey after her father provide start-up capital to run the local store.

Audrey recalls her husband as a workaholic with a great passion for the agricultural industry.

"The social environment at the time was that women married and had kids for their career," she said.

"He was just a good all-round guy and he would always want to help out."

John's daughter Michele Bentink also recalled her father as a giant of a man.

"I never ever doubted that my Dad loved me and was totally devoted to his family," she said. "But the only time we had holidays with Dad was when we went somewhere there wasn't a phone.

"It would be a bit different to today, we probably would never have seen him.

"He was always available when needed and many times when he had come home to rest

when he had a migraine, he'd get up to the phone or respond to clients.

"It was many years later that I realised just how severe migraines can be and I feel bad that I used to wake him up when clients called.

"Dad taught me about book-keeping and Kalamazoo triple entry.

"He said it was one of the best. He taught me how to answer the phone in a professional manner from home and how important it was to the business.

"Dad even tried to help me with maths once but got frustrated when I didn't quite understand the points he was making, especially as he went off to hospital with another heart attack.

"We agreed not to do that again and even joked about it.

"We can look back in hindsight and with all sorts of comments, but that's just the way it was then.

"Dad's motto with clients who had some trouble with payments was: "Just ring me and talk to me about it.

"He told me customer service was a priority and he'd rather look after and keep his customers than drive a crippling sale.

"Dad was adventurous with his business ventures and a real visionary."

I used to talk to him about taking over the business, but I don't think he ever thought seriously about it.

The enduring AA (Sandy) Lewis

It would be accurate to describe Alexander Ashley (Sandy) Lewis as a secretary for all seasons.

A fiercely proud Liberal Party member and former Member of the Legislative Assembly, Sandy epitomises the oft-quoted saying: "When the going gets tough, the tough get going."

Yes, many people found him abrasive.

Yet those who met with him were left in no doubt that this abrasiveness was born of a passion for getting things right.

It was a major reason for his entry into politics.

And few could hold a position when confronted by an erudite and forceful Sandy.

Armed to the teeth with facts, he concisely set pathways of action, because he was a man of action.

Born in Adelaide, in 1921, but with farming roots, he was schooled at St Peter's College, St Mark's University and Dookie College.

In the early 1950s, it seemed logical to work on his uncle's farm at Tullanook for 15 months before a stint as an overseer for 18 months, handling sheep and fat lambs at Gregory Station in Hay in the western Riverina region of south western New South Wales.

Clearly with agriculture in his blood, his mind turned to machinery and thoughts of selling tractors.

With an uncle in Kojonup, Western Australia, he made the trip across the Nullarbor during 1951 and 1952 and initially went back to overseeing on a Kojonup farm before working for a contractor named Ray Haggerty in crop and clover harvesting and hay baling.

After several years he had saved enough money to buy a 3800 acre property between Kojonup and Cranbrook and returned to sheep farming.

But after marrying his first wife, Patricia Ann, he moved on to Boyup Brook and established P and S Agencies in 1958, initially selling dips and drenches.

He then took over the adjacent garage attached to the agency building, which expanded P and S Agencies and caught the eye of a roving New Holland chief Jack Scott -- considered the doyen of Australian farm machinery -- who was looking for dealers.



A time for celebration as Sandy Lewis accepts a plaque recognising his service to the farm mechanisation industry at the FMDA's annual general meeting in 2008.

From left, the then FMDA secretary John Henchy, WARM president Alan Fisher, Sandy's daughter Bronwyn, Sandy and FMDA president Geoff Perkins.

Sandy explains: "Jack asked me if I wanted a New Holland franchise.

"I said to him I knew nothing about tractors, though I was interested in them.

"He then asked me if I could sell and I told him I wasn't that good.

"But he said he trusted me and would give me all the help I needed.

"I got superb help and I remember one year I received an award as the top WA dealership.

"Apart from tractors, we sold a lot of New Holland hay gear, including a 57 model rake that came with a life-time guarantee, and needless to say, they were a top seller."

Sandy also became an ag parts dealer for Fiat and CLAAS but he turned back offers to sell International Harvester and Chamberlain equipment.

Apart from his passion to form a united dealer body, Sandy also was cultivating a political career.

In 1972 he won Liberal Party endorsement for the seat of Blackwood and successfully started a political career as a Member of the Legislative Assembly.

Two years later he moved to the Upper House as a Member of the Legislative Council for the seat of Lower Central.

Juggling a machinery dealership with politics was not a problem for Sandy but generating a cash flow as a dealer in 1975-76 was.

With about \$750,000 worth of tractors hanging around his proverbial neck, Sandy planned an exit strategy as a dealer to concentrate on politics and his role as FMDA secretary.

His elevation as Liberal Party secretary also provided FMDA executive members, in those days, a more sumptuous meeting venue at Parliament House.

Sandy also was instrumental in forming a national machinery body and great assisted FMDA members with an annual Cost of Doing Business survey, for use in benchmarking analysis.

It was almost instantly recognised by the banks as an accurate assessment of profit and loss of a dealership.

But momentum waned among dealers to complete the annual form and it died on the proverbial vine, much to the chagrin of Sandy, who believed it to be a valuable tool for dealers.

Sandy retired as secretary of the FMDA in 2007 ending a 30 year association in an official capacity.

United we stand:

The formation of a national body

Looking after the welfare of machinery dealers was arguably the main reason why FMDA members were keen to set up a national body and in 1978 it was decided to canvas support to form a national body.

A trip east by FMDA secretary Sandy Lewis canvassed opinion among other State organisations and won support from Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. The WA association sent out invitations to members of like bodies throughout Australia and in some cases, subsidised dealers to make the trip west.

It was an onerous job, mostly carried out by Sandy Lewis's secretary Leonie Chidlow who scoured the names and addresses of 2400 dealers or sellers of farm machinery throughout Australia.

Letters were sent to them all inviting them to a meeting at the Claremont Showgrounds in 1979.

At this meeting, a national executive was formed comprising John Lynn (WA), Fred Ainsworth (Queensland), Ron McLintock (NSW), Bill Larwood (SA) and secretary Sandy Lewis.

Although not all States were represented it was arranged to hold the first annual meeting in Victoria in 1980.

The inaugural president was John Lynn but unfortunately John died before the first meeting and Queenslander Peter Kendall was appointed, with Victorian association president Lynton Evans as vice president and Sandy Lewis as secretary.

Peter was a Massey Ferguson dealer from Cairns and did a remarkable job for two years in liaison with Sandy, despite the great distance between the two States.

Agenda items at that first meeting included:

- Affiliation and forming a Tasmanian branch.
- Formation of a hire purchase company.
- Agriculture complaints committee.
- A tractor testing station.
- Company owned stores.
- ROPS regulations.
- Use of the WA logo.
- Apprenticeship training.

And a budget was set for the following year.

Action on the agenda items saw no action on Tasmania as the Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce took over the Tasmanian association.

A testing station held interest for a number of years but never materialised.

Company-owned stores disappeared.

The Hire Purchase idea did not continue because it was felt the manufacturers were going to fill this gap. Although it took some years to do so.

The complaints committees existed for a number of years without being overwhelmed with work. The last complaint recorded in WA was confusing.

The manufacturer was not a member of the Tractor and Machinery Association (TMA), the dealer was not a member of the FMDA and the farmer was not a member of a farm organisation.

According to Sandy, few complaints were addressed by the complaints committee, which he believed was a reflection of the dealer and farmer relationship.

Before the 1980 meeting, Sandy visited Queensland, NSW, Victoria and SA to formalise associations in those States as divisions of the Automobile Chamber of Commerce.

Following the 1980 meeting, the association's general business was held by phone hook-up, mainly involving Peter Kendall, Sandy Lewis and Russel Tyrie of the Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce (VACC).

Recalls Sandy: "At this stage of the association's short life, communication was poor and it seemed only Victoria, northern Queensland, SA and WA were interested in the concept of a national body."

The following year a meeting was held in Orange at the national fields days in NSW, marked by several dramas, the first being the nearest accommodations was in Bathurst. It was decided to hold the meeting there.

Ron McClintock represented Bob Dobie, the NSW president and then the NSW secretary John Goodall became ill. So the NSW meeting, which was held first, was run by Sandy and Russell Tyrie, with only one NSW dealer present.

At the national meeting, several new issues came to the fore, including warranties and franchises but the national flavour swung decidedly to the States when transport and towing of overwidth equipment was discussed.

It was eventually considered a State matter.

The national look was further dented at the Orange Filed Days where ostensibly, a site was set up to promote the national body.

But attention was diverted to Bob Dobie's tractor on display which the executive deemed as unproductive in promoting the national body.

The following year at Hazlemere, McLaren Vale SA, was notable as a conference where the majority of the association's aims were brought together.

Nobody could put a finger on the reason, but the trust executive members had for one another was clearly evident.

This in turn produced leadership for the industry and much of the credit should go to the SA secretary Ron Markin, who showed that treating the interstate delegates with courtesy and good organisation, paid big dividends.

At this meeting Peter Kendall retired and his position was taken by Victorian association president Lynton Evans.

It was at this meeting in 1982 that FMDA and TMA executives met to allay any misconceptions about the respective bodies.

Dealers began to realise they had a bigger stake in the industry than the manufacturers and although there had been some opposition from the TMA to the national dealer body, it was people like Jack Scott who backed the organisation.

So with hard years behind and regular meetings occurring between the national FMDA and TMA, the two associations put to rest many misconceptions.

It also was the start of group meetings with the manufacturers, led again by Jack Scott. There also were emerging thoughts that perhaps the two bodies could amalgamate as machinery dealers believed their position as not properly being looked after by the motor trades organisations.

Efforts were made to interest NSW in the body and meetings were held with Don Holstock in Sydney with some urging from Bob Davison of VACC.

Interestingly, one major topic discussed was the government's lack of concern for rural business.

The 1983 meeting was held at Surfer's Paradise and meetings were again held with the TMA from which a working party was set up to look into warranties, overtime and travelling rates, better liaison with manufacturers and other matters which surprisingly drew few disputes.

Some of the amusing incidents at this conference included a collective holding of breath while Queensland Minister Russ Hinze, a man of largesse, tried to mount the nine inch platform on which he was to make a speech and the loss of Sandy's Diners card on the eve of leaving for the United States.

True to the advertisement, he obtained another one within 24 hours.

In 1984 it was Perth's turn to host the meeting with the main topics being machine guarding, sales tax, occupational health and safety, and towing of farm machinery. Reflecting the evolution of the industry, computers as a business tool was a major topic of discussion.

By the time the association decided to meet in Adelaide in 1985, the association had started to make great strides and to have a political impact and a great proportion of time was given to universal problems between dealers and manufacturers.

At the meeting a new idea emerged to train young people to encourage them into a career in the farm mechanisation industry.

It was envisaged to be a combined venture between dealers and manufacturers to train cadets and to give them knowledge of all sides of the industry.

It was to be a three year course with the cadets spending one of those years with the manufacturer.

A note on the minutes of the meeting said the idea would be hard to achieve and so it proved.



The unveiling of the Farm Machinery Industries Association logo in 2013, held by the then president Alan Fisher (left) and executive officer John Henchy. The FMIA, superseded the FMDA and WARM and is now playing a more dynamic role in the farm mechanisation industry.

New issues discussed included lack of response to Cost of Doing Business Survey, credit legislation and rural credit cards.

The year 1986 saw the meeting return to Victoria, with new headaches on the horizon in the form of a fringe benefits tax, superannuation and a franchise review.

The minutes reflected a deep concern in confidence in senior management of the manufacturers and a motion to boycott all field days was put up and lost.

NSW hosted the 1987 meeting in Sydney where the main items on the agenda were an IAC submission on spare parts, a request to Telecom for volume discount on phone calls and capital gains tax.

Again forceful debate focused on the need for an overall body to represent not only farmers but also the whole ag industry because it was felt a number of bodies were fighting for the same ends and that one combined effort would do a better job.

In 1988, delegates met in Toowoomba, Queensland and several visits were made to the State's Expo celebrations.

The only dampener was the fact that many of the delegates had to drive home because of the lack of planes.

Ron Markin set the record, driving back to Adelaide.

Interestingly at the Queensland meeting, discussion was held on the formation of the Motor Trades Association of Australia, which in later years was to be the subject of much negativity by many machinery dealers.

In fact, as early as 1989, the subject of the MTAA was on the association's agenda, with a query to that organisation on whether it was going to help the national dealer association.

A decision was made to hand over the secretariat to MTAA in the ensuing 12 months with a request the MTAA allow the FMDA to be affiliated with MTAA despite the WA division not being a member of the MTA of WA.

The transition of the secretariat was agreed on by the MTAA but the organisation never gave an answer on the second proposal.

Ironically 17 WA machinery dealers already were MTA members and 16 resigned during what can be described as an acrimonious period.

A man with machinery in his blood



Former John Deere division Marketing Manager John Henchy (left) receives the John Lynne Memorial Award from FMDA secretary Sandy Lewis while FMDA president Geoff Perkins looks on during the FMDA annual general meeting in 2007.

From the time he left school, Farm Machinery & Industry Association executive officer John Henchy was destined to play a key role in the farm mechanisation industry. John was bought up on a farm in Kenya, East Africa, and when he left school his parents thought he should be exposed to how others lived and being of English extract suggested he go to the UK.

John's mother had an uncle who worked at Ransome Sims and Jefferies in Ipswich, Suffolk, manufacturers of farm machinery, who was able to get John enrolled in what they called a special apprenticeship, exposing John to all the different departments in the factory and it gave him a good rounding of what was involved with manufacturing, marketing and sales.

Sandwiched in-between his time at Ransomes, he went to an agricultural college in Writtle, near Chelmsford, and became a Graduate of the Institute of Agricultural Engineers.

But it was in Australia that he made his mark.

He started his career selling Fordson tractors in Horsham, Victoria, then joined the then JI Case as territory manager at Toowoomba, Queensland, before managing a JI Case retail store in Moree, NSW.

In 1971, he joined the Ford Motor Company in Melbourne and within four years had been promoted as State manager of the company in WA, a position he held for six years.

He joined Chamberlain John Deere in 1981 as the company's WA manager at its branch in Welshpool before John Deere decided to move its operations to a head office in Brisbane.

John stayed in WA and served in various roles embracing dealer development and product support before being appointed southern division marketing manager for WA, SA and New Zealand.

Apart from John Deere, John was an active participant in promoting the farm mechanisation industry which led to him being elected chairman of the Tractor and Machinery Association of Australia (TMA) in 1991.

He remains the longest serving chairman with an unbroken tenure of five years from 2008 to 2013..

During that time, he oversaw a radical change in the TMA's structure, moving from a gentleman's club to a dynamic professional business organisation that now involves itself in international business and manufacturing relations.

In 1998 received an Outstanding Service award from the association and in 2007 was awarded the John Lynn Memorial Award by the FMDA, ironically the year he became its executive officer.

His departure from John Deere in 2007 and acceptance of a role with the FMDA signalled a new era for John and his wife Claire, who until that stage had been married to a fly-in fly-out husband.

In many ways he had turned the full circle, starting his career in the farm mechanisation industry at dealer level and entering his twilight years working with dealers as the Executive Officer of the now-named Farm Machinery & Industry Association of WA (Inc).

"I look back on my life with pride having been fortunate to work in such a wonderful industry," John said. "As I tell people, if I had my time again I would do the same thing."

He considers one of the many highlights of his career was to represent the industry though the TMA.

Ironically, he has again become linked to the TMA through by the FMIA's decision to affiliate with the TMA.

He sees the move sending a strong signal to the industry of a stronger and more unified voice for the farm mechanisation industry.

"The future of mankind relies on food and without us, the farm mechanisation industry, productivity would be nowhere near what it is today," he said. "In fact if it were not for us agriculture, horticulture, viticulture and all the other 'cultures' would stop.

"I plan to keep working in this industry while I believe I can make a contribution and it is a focus of mine to encourage as many young people as I can to be part of agriculture directly or indirectly in agribusiness.

"Agriculture is not only about farming but about being part of the largest industry in the world with the vital responsibility of feeding the world.

"What nobler career can one have?"

The life and times of the Association's machinery dealers



The Nichols story

IN 1947 Jack Nichols, wife Eileen, children Diane and Terry moved from the family farm at Babakin, between Bruce Rock and Corrigin to Narembeen, to take over the Narembeen Agency business.

Another daughter, Nola, was born in 1950 at Narembeen

The purchase of the Narembeen Agency was made possible by the generous support of Jack Gabbedy of the then Agricultural Bank.

The agency was a hardware store representing HV McKay, Southern Cross, Sydney Atkinson Motor (GM) and Malloch Bros.

In those days (post-war), the purchase of a new car was a big occasion.

Jack and the buyer would travel to Perth and arrange the deal at Sydney Atkinson Motors and then drive the new car home on the long gravel road.

On many occasions the buyer would not travel with Jack to Perth but would trust him to do the deal and deliver the new car in Narembeen.

But gaining the franchise for Massey Harris tractors really started the agency going as a dealership.

Early Massey models included the 203.55D, 555D and 745D and in those days no trades were taken, as there was a waiting list and the old unit was easily pre-sold long before the new one arrived.

Holden's FJ series release saw the agency hold its first festive gala reveal of the FJ at the dealership and subsequently, each time a new model arrived, the dealer would have a gala unveiling with people travelling quite a distance to witness it and partake in the festivities.

It wasn't long before a name change was deemed necessary, so the agency became WJ Nichols Pty Ltd and the company traded under this name until the business was sold in 1991.

On arrival home from college, Jack took Terry to the front of the shop and pointed out the two banks in town.

He said, "They call themselves banks but in fact they are only shops selling money. "Any advice given by them will, in the first instance be in their best interests, to sell more money.

"You may benefit from this advice but they will always benefit."

This was very sound advice is very vivid in Terry's memory and could almost be folklore.

It became a guiding light when Terry was involved in any dealings with banks.

The first of Terry's forays to trade schools was to Westinghouse to gain a certificate as a refrigeration mechanic, re-gassing and changing sealed units, etc. This knowledge proved invaluable in later times for air-conditioning, both in the homes and later in all forms of transport and farm machines.



Terry Nichols with his Nichols Triple Action tine and tool bar he successfully marketed in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

In the late fifties GM began to appoint direct dealers and WJ Nichols gained a franchise, thus bypassing Sydney Atkinsons and Attwood Motors in Perth. Adjoining premises were acquired from the old Narembeen Club and turned into the service centre and showrooms.

Terry arrived home from college in 1962 and his efforts were mainly into the Retravision side of the business as the MF side was not proving profitable. The opportunity to represent Chamberlain Industries and Sperry New Holland came up in 1963.

Massey headers had been selling well with 14 sold that year and all the trades remained unsold as most did not have bulk-handling facilities.

The early days of Chamberlain bring to mind some interesting people. Ron Rafferty of CJD Equipment was the sales rep and taught Terry the business of canvassing, prospecting systems and selling, and more importantly, how to close the deal.

Doug Slater of Ratten & Slater, Esperance, was the service rep and showed Terry how to set up a one-way disc plough.

Tim Ratten was the New Holland sales rep.

The eighties saw Chamberlain rationalise its dealer points.

Group areas of Muckinbudin and Trayning, for example, and this was extended to take in Quairading, Beverly, Kondinin, Hyden and out as far as Lake Varley.

This was the consolidation of 11 dealer points into the control of one dealer with two main outlets in Merredin and Naremben with sales/service points in Corrigin, Bruce Rock and Kewdale.

“At the time, I was told by JD that the re-named Nicols Machinery covered the greatest area in square miles of any dealer in the world,” Terry said. “We had the largest JD sign in the world on the west side of the ex-RAAF shed in Merredin.

“This large area prompted the purchase of the first and subsequent Cessna 182 aircraft, to enable us to sell second hand units as far away as Tardun and Esperance.

“Our second Cessna VH WSY was purchased in Nebraska USA and flown via the Pacific route to Australia.”

Aircraft made the job much easier for Terry with both his boys at school in Perth and a developing concave operation in Kewdale (named Nicols Concaves) -- such a large area to cover.

In the early nineties, drought, poor wheat and sheep prices, high interest rates and too many trades caused much turmoil both personally and financially for Terry.

The alarming drop to \$90 a tonne for wheat along with overdraft interest hitting 23 per cent saw 1991 become a year of rationalisation and re-locating the concave business, the engineering base, in Kewdale.

“This was probably the hardest decision I had to make in my life to that stage,” Terry said. “Naremben and the business was my life.”

During one of the many cyclical downturns that agriculture had, Terry’s attention turned overseas to Saudi Arabia.

Terry was the farming director of a large irrigation project south of Riyadh, turning the desert green to grow wheat under irrigation.

Some local staff and farmers were employed to operate the project in Saudi.

This enabled the business to retain valuable staff to spring back when good times came at home.

Locally manufactured equipment was sent to Saudi.

In the early days of the association, W J Nichols stayed with the Automotive Chamber of Commerce, but it soon became evident the body could not represent the dealership adequately in the field of farm machinery.

Terry was later to become the State president of FMDA for five years, even serving as national FMDAA president for a short while.

During his time as State president, Terry was instrumental in bringing together FMDA and WARM (Western Australian Regional Manufacturers).

It was WARM that represented the concave manufacturing business Nichols Concaves, which sold Australia-wide and exported to New Zealand, South Africa, UK Europe and Canada.

Two OEM companies were using the Nicols units but they had to be painted in each company's colours and not advertise the fact.

"We also made OEM replacement parts under contract," Terry said.

A highlight of the export venture was to be recognised by the Royal Society of Agricultural Engineers at the Smithfield Show in England with a special award of merit for contribution to agriculture,

Also in the nineties, no-till farming was the new way forward and thus Terry went on to develop the Triple Action no-till tine and tool bar, which was successfully marketed for a time until it was decided that the time had come for Terry to retire.

The no-till side was taken over by WA company Primary Sales Australia and at this time is marketed as the Primary Precision Seeder in substantially unmodified form.

The concave business was sold to the UK distributor and continues today.

Heading towards a century of service

It was an inter-generational celebration on Friday, October 30, 2009, when Cunderdin machinery dealership Baxters Rural Centre notched its 90th year as a business.

Current dealer principal Russell Baxter and his wife Corrina and Russell's father Ken and his wife Beryl welcomed a range of customers and business associates to recognise one of the town's oldest businesses started by Ken's grandfather Robert and father Bill in 1919.

The business operated out of the depot shearing shed office, on the corner of Main Street and Baxter Road, where most of the district's farmers did their shearing and dipping.

The building remains operational today housing machinery as well as a general storage facility.

While still farming a 400ha (1000ac) property north of the town, Robert Lees Baxter and his son Kenneth William (Bill), started the business RL Baxter and Sons, as McCormick Deering agents, which later became International Harvester Australia Co.

The pair also were involved with Texaco Oils and later on with the stock firm Goldsborough Mort.

In 1940, they upgraded from the shed to offices and workshop in the main shopping centre in Main Street but 10 years later moved back to a new office and workshop where they exist today.

At that time, the trading name changed to Baxters Rural Centre.

Bill's son Ken became involved in 1962 and took over the reins from Bill in 1970.

In 1986, Baxters were appointed Ford New Holland dealers after the amalgamation of International Harvester and Case Corporation.

The partnership has proven to be a very successful business venture and saw the business expand to carry other leading franchises from Morris Seeding Products, Simplicity Australia, Primary Sales, Yeomans Ploughs, Trimble, Liugong, Grizzly, Brandt Grain Belts and Iveco Trucks.

Baxters Rural Centre also is a stockist for Northam Bearing Sales.

Apart from Cunderdin, the dealership services Meckering, Tammin, Kellerberrin, Doodlakine and Wyalkatchem.

Ken's son Russell started in the business in 1983 to become a fourth generation link and he took over from Ken as dealer principal in 2002.

With 18-year-old son Kieran showing interest in the workshop after school hours, Russell senses there maybe a fifth generation Baxter to be groomed for the business.

"The door is open for that if that is what he wants to do but it will be up to him," Russell said.

According to Ken and Russell, the resilience of the business can be attributed to "good old fashioned service".

With a staff of 10 people, the focus always remains on customers.

"Being farmers we understand the importance of machinery and the flexibility required to keep gear in good working order," Ken said. "But it goes beyond that good working relationship and extends into friendships which are the real strength of communities."

Ken and Russell also are keen to promote the business as an excellent career pathway for young people.

"There are plenty of opportunities in machinery dealerships to suit a range of interests," Russell said. "And whether you're in the workshop, parts, sales or administration, you are part of a community culture that keeps the bush alive."

"I think the outlook for the next generation of farmers is really positive and we're in for some exciting times with ever-changing technologies that are assisting the industry to become more cost-effective and sustainable."

Small machinery dealerships like Baxters Rural Centre, Cunderdin, still form a strong foundation for many country towns. The service ethic which was a hallmark of the business when it started in 1919, still remains a major focus of today's staff, pictured here with father and son owners Russell and Ken Baxter (foreground).



Handing on to the next generation

Successful Narrogin dealer Geoff Perkins, Perkins Farm Machinery Centre in front of his original dealer shed inside new premises which were built in 2008.



SUCCESSION planning can be a difficult topic around the kitchen table.

And it certainly is one that most machinery dealers have handled well to ensure the continuation of a successful dealership.

Narrogin machinery dealer Geoff Perkins, Perkins Farm Machinery Centre, has his three adult children working in key roles in the dealership as he draws near to day of handover after a successful career and involvement in the Farm Machinery Dealers Association (FMDA).

He became involved with the FMDA in 1989 and almost immediately joined the association's executive committee, a position he has maintained to the current time. Between 2005 and 2010 he also served as the association's president.

While Geoff still has a few more kilometres in his tank, he knows the business will be in good hands when he finally decides to enter into some form of retirement.

What that will be is still a mystery because Geoff still rides the bike leg in the odd triathlon and enjoys the active life.

"Bowls doesn't thrill me," he retorts, in his typical laconic Aussie accent.

He enjoys mixing with young people, which is no sleight on his older friends.

It's just, well, young people are more active.

A graduate from the school of hard knocks, he despairs, however, at the lack of endeavour from so many young people, who have graduated from what he calls, the school of soft bellies.

With long-held memories of hard times when he was young, the current cheap and throwaway dictum of today's society grates against his experiences of fixing things that didn't work.

His father bought a farm in Williams in 1924 and Geoff has fond memories of his early life on the farm.

"I left school in 1962 before I could get a certificate, to work on the farm and the farm became school," Geoff said.

"But then I went to Narrogin Ag College (under age) and did two years of agricultural course.

He was the youngest graduate from the college at the time and missed an Honours mark by one per cent.

"It was the best two years of my education because we learnt about mechanics, wood work and metal work," he said.

"I went back to the farm in 1964 and quickly found we had no money to fix machinery, so I learnt things from my dad and neighbours, like welding.

"Once I got the hang of that I wanted to fix everything.

"Dad would often say to me, 'that's bugged', and I'd say, not it's not, I can fix it."

His Mr-Fixit attitude held him in good stead when his father became ill and Geoff was flying, proverbially, by the seat of his pants to run the farm.

"I went straight in at the deep end started contract hay cutting and baling and harvesting to subsidise the farm income."

The farm doubled in size to 1200ha (2500ac) by 1973 but with two boys in the family it seemed an inevitability that the farm would not support two families.

At that stage, Geoff was intent on farming, even leasing a Hyden property.

But in 1980, an opportunity came up to buy the Narrogin International Harvester dealership and Geoff's life changed forever.

"Actually it was bad timing," Geoff said. "Wool was okay but cropping was only good for sheep feed, plus on the leased property, I lost the whole crop to frost.

"And in 1984, Case took over International Harvester and we lost the franchise, so we just relied on minor franchises, like Fiat and Belarus, plus repair work.

"We ran the Williams property until 1988, then sold it and I concentrated on the dealership and within four years I took on New Holland."

With fortune changing for the better, Geoff also started a family, not knowing the embryonic stages of succession were forming as sons Shane and Chris and daughter Joanne gradually took an interest in the business.

"Both boys wanted to be mechanics and at the start I taught them everything they had to know under a TAFE-accredited course even though I didn't have the piece of paper to do it," Geoff said. "I still haven't got that paper (accreditation).

"All my lessons were from practical experience and that's how I taught the boys."

Today, Shane is regarded as one of the best baler and header mechanics in WA while Chris is showing his competency as spare parts manager.

And Joanne is now administrative manager.

Geoff refurbished the dealership in 2008, which included a new service shed, new showrooms and administrative wing.

It was a major investment for a dealer with no branches and a restricted selling area but the dealership's market share for New Holland is above the State and national average.



Geoff Perkins (left) with former Carnamah John Shearer dealer Paul Patiniotis and then WARM president Peter Nunn at a FMDA annual general meeting in 2005.

"Primarily we have grown from just a service outlet to a busy sales outlet," Geoff said.

"We still have a very experienced workshop and it's highly valued by farmers because they know we work with them.

"It's our policy to stay open in busy times for parts and service.

"Being a farmer I can appreciate their needs and where we can help as a dealer to alleviate a hassle, we'll do it."

That part of Geoff could almost be described as the cornerstone of his business.

A sort of motto: If it can be fixed, let's make it happen.

Looking into the future, Geoff sees a growth in corporate farms.

"We've still got a long way to go to reach the peak of production which is attractive to investors," he said. "They know the world has got to be fed so agriculture will become increasingly important.

"And whoever is running the farms, they'll still need dealers and the expertise and service we can give as technology evolves.

"Our job is to stay at the cutting edge."

That's an almost subliminal message Geoff sends to each of his staff as he oversees sales and service.

It would seem the tranquil days of an easier life are still a long way off for Geoff.

But then again, with his children doing such a good job in the dealership, one never knows.

A train driver with a head of steam

Not too many people know that the late FarmPower Quairading machinery dealer principal Mick Laycock spent eight years in Fremantle.

It always produced a cheeky grin from the laconic Mick, who was well known for his dry jokes.

The inference, of course, was that he spent time in Freo jail, but the North Fremantle-born and East Fremantle Football Club stalwart explained to first-timers listening to him, it referred to his time as a railway worker.

He started his career in 1948 as a number taker in the Fremantle marshalling yards, itemising trailer numbers and their contents.

He was 18 at the time and right from the start he set a determined career pathway for himself.

With positive signs such as "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail", scattered around his office, Mick left no doubt in anybody's mind his attitude to life.

There was always a youthful exuberance in every thing he did and he regarded agriculture as an exciting industry.

In fact he admitted agriculture was more exciting than his time in the railways, which saw him fulfil the boyhood dream of most males ... to become an engine driver.

It looked as though Mick had become entrenched as a train driver after he was transferred to Toodyay and spent 10 years in the district.

But a decision by his brother-in-law to buy a farm at Quairading changed his life.

His brother Geoff wanted Mick to run the farm, so he decided to have a go.

And when another brother-in-law bought a clover harvester, Mick found himself in a business partnership, which later became Quairading Service Contractors in 1964.

The company expanded when it took on a fuel distributorship and then added CSBP to its books as an anhydrous ammonia distributor.

Mick was involved in a lot of trials for CSBP in those days and believed anhydrous ammonia could have taken off but for the lack of suitable machinery at the time.

And CSBP introduced granular nitrogenous fertiliser, which was cheaper and easier to spread.

So Mick became a spreading contractor.

In 1966 Mick decided to take on the Connor Shea franchise, selling the famous Connor Shea one-way plough.

He took 28 orders in one day but could only get 10 of them that year for a waiting clientele.



The late FarmPower dealer principal Mick Laycock maintained a busy schedule after 40 years as a machinery dealer and as an active committeeman on the Quairading Shire Council and later as shire president. Mick passed away in 2011.

Two years later he signed up as a General Motors Holden dealer and by the 1970s, he had the Honda franchise under his wing.

In the 70s he was the second biggest Honda dealer in WA behind Mott Honda averaging 52 bike sales a month with a best figure of 92.

Those sort of sales figures, however, were not reserved for bikes as company award plaques, which adorned the FarmPower walls, testified.

And Mick reckoned he had won 52 overseas trips related to product sales awards during his time as a dealer.

In 1968 Mick was appointed as a New Holland dealer and didn't take long to gain a sizeable market share with new tractors and combine harvesters.

Mick also was a big Steiger tractor dealer, topped the State selling Flexi-Coil seeding rigs and started a revolution in the early 1990s by introducing one of the first self-propelled boomsprayers into WA.

He formed a company called GatorPower and sold more than 70 US-made AgChem Rogators and Terragators Australia-wide before AgChem was sold to AGCO.

Also in his product stable were leading companies such as Ausplow, Gason, Hardi, Burando Hill, Marshall and Valtra.

"I wish I could wind back the clock," he used to say, particularly as he loved to be involved in a family farm at Mt Madden where his brother still oversees a 6000ha cropping programme.

Brothers in arms at Carnamah



Hal Walton (right) with his brother the late Terry Walton as the pair held a farewell party in 2005 after selling the business to the Afagri Group. T H and Walton Stores ran a successful John Deere dealership for 38 years.

One of Australia's most prominent machinery dealers in the latter half of the 1900s, was Hal Walton.

Hal, still a director of John Deere dealership Greenline, was a former dealer principal of T and H Walton Stores, Carnamah.

Hal started the business in 1967 with his brother Terry following a short career as a car salesman selling Holden and then Chevrolets and Pontiacs for the then major retailer Sydney Atkinson Motors.

At the time, Terry was a commercial business manager representing builders and contractors.

Both had a desire to own farms, so when a business opportunity arose in Carnamah, the brothers jumped at the chance.

"It was a business that had franchises for Chamberlain tractors and Chrysler and Dodge motor vehicles and trucks, along with the general store, newsagency and drapery," Hal recalled.

“Initially we thought we would work to get enough money for each of us to buy a farm somewhere.”

In 1976, the brothers bought a small farm to the west in 1982 Hal brought another property east of the town.

But the brothers continued to build their business and expand their machinery dealership premises. Eventually they also established branches in Geraldton, Morawa and Moora and soon became one of John Deere’s most successful dealerships, winning awards annually for service, parts and sales.

The dealership was so successful it was the subject of a sale in 2003 to the South African Afgri Group.

Terry retired in 2004, while Hal continued in the business until 2006 before retiring. Then in 2008 he returned to the John Deere group investing in the setting up of Greenline Ag, with branches in Perth, Wagin, Narrogin, Lake Grace, Boyup Brook and Witchliffe.

“Being involved in the farm mechanisation industry has been a very exciting career and I’ve been privileged to be involved in what arguably has been the best era in the history of agriculture,” Hal said.

“Our focus always has been on service to customers and that continues to be our main focus.

“I think it is the most significant reason for our success, because we have a very loyal clientele.

“And the same can be said for our staff, all of whom have played an important role in the day to day running of the business.

“On handover to Afgri, 20 of our staff had been with the company for 15 years and nine for more than 20 years.

Hal is well known for his promotion of John Deere products and is passionate about restoring vintage Chamberlain and John Deere tractors, witnessed by a historic museum he has created at Carnamah with about 65 completed restorations.

Hal was a member of the executive of the FMDA during the 1980s.



Hal Walton in a bumper wheat crop with his beloved John Deere header in the background.

Here comes the third generation

It is not widely known that JK Sales was the first Australian John Deere dealership, established on December 16, 1967. Mention John Jolly and Ron Kittler and the memories will come flooding back to the few remaining residents of Ballidu and surrounding districts. Mention Jolly and Sons and the picture becomes clearer of a nearly 50 year association with John Deere and hundreds of farmers.



Dalwallinu machinery dealer Ken Jolly is flanked by his sons Kirk (left) and Dan, both of whom are involved in the company's succession plans.

If John Jolly were alive, he would be a proud dad, witnessing the growth of the small company which started in humble premises and the careers of his three sons Ken, Haydn and Craig.

And there would be a special beam of pride watching his two grandsons Kirk and Dan working in the dealership today with Dan now in the manager's chair and Kirk in charge of the important service division.

Ken became dealer principal of the successful business which also embraces a branch in Wongan Hills and employs more than 40 people, many of whom have more than 10 years experience with the company.

Haydn now takes care of the company's transport division while Craig sold his business of several transport companies including Jetstyle Express and WA Freightlines, and is now in property development.

Ken remembers in 1963 his father decided to buy a hardware store in Ballidu.

"He spent years on a farm at Nungarin then worked for six years with the Shell Oil Co," Ken said.

"So all the family moved to Ballidu and dad also ran the school, bus from the old Dalgety store.

During this time John also became an agent for Wigmore's where he started work as a spotter, finding out who needed a new tractor, or combine harvester.

He quickly established a reputation for his business acumen and in 1966, John Deere offered him a dealership which he took up with Ron Kittler the following year.

The partners moved the business to Dalwallinu in 1972 with John and Ron and their respective wives Val and Joy, buying R and M Machinery in the main street.

Ken started working in the business in 1970, driving the school bus, delivering fuel and being involved in general administrative work.

"I remember hauling pyramids of 44 gallon fuel drums to farms throughout the district in those days," Ken said. "It was a tough job and I wish there had been bulk fuel carriers in those days."

In 1982, Ken, Haydn and Craig purchased Ron and Joy Kittler's share of JK Sales changing the name to Jolly and Sons.

Ken stayed in Ballidu until 1982 then moved to Dalwallinu, moving into spare parts before taking on an administrative role and then taking over the business with his brothers in 1984 when John retired from the business.

In 1993, the three brothers sold the Ballidu store and Craig bought the family transport business, which at that stage comprised three trucks.

Jolly and Sons continued to prosper and in July 2001, the business bought the John Deere dealership from Agro Machinery in Wongan Hills.

In 2004 Haydn moved to Perth to concentrate on the transport business, which has prospered under his management.

Seven years ago, Jolly and Sons moved from its ageing Dalwallinu premises to a modern complex south of the town on Great Northern Highway.

It remains one of the top John Deere dealerships in WA and also successfully holds the Nissan and Ford vehicle franchises for the district.

Dan has moved into the branch manager role at Dalwallinu while Kirk is now service manager.

Haydn's son Steele is now general manager of the Transport Division

According to Ken, while agriculture will continue to have its ups and downs, the Jolly and Sons dealership remains solid.

"We're here for the long haul and it's pleasing to see our sons involved in the business," he said. "Hopefully we've got our succession plans sorted."

Succession planning with three sons

The popular television series *My Three Sons*, which ran from 1961 to 1972, gave everybody a glimpse of a household of different characters. And, quite naturally, reflected the growing pains (and joys) of parents guiding their children into adulthood without quenching the individuality and drive of each child. There's a key there that Bill and Pam Boekeman, Wongan Hills, used with great effect in bringing their three sons into the family business before they retired. The pair started Boekeman's Machinery in 1968 as a partnership business and expanded with branches in Dalwallinu (first as an agency in 1970), Dowerin (1984) and Northam (1999), before officially retiring in 2000 as their sons Stuart, Andrew and Tim had stepped up to the plate to continue running the business. The generational takeover was a seamless affair, reflecting the fruits of regular family discussions that always sought resolutions to problems.

Pam and Bill Boekeman flank their three sons Andrew (left), Tim and Stuart, all of whom have taken over the business reins of successful Case IH machinery dealership Boekeman Machinery. The company's main branch is located in Wongan Hills with branches at Dalwallinu, Dowerin and Northam.



It was clearly evident to Bill and Pam as their sons grew up that each was gifted in a different way and each son needed to be encouraged to grow his own branch on the family tree, so to speak.

"We don't overdo the blood line," Bill said matter-of-factly, making a point that each son was treated with the same respect with no favouritism handed out by doting parents.

When the boys came home from boarding school after TEE exams, all wanted to be part of their parents' business.

They were encouraged with Bill's philosophy of doing what you're best at.

Stuart preferred extra study at business college while Andrew and Tim were given opportunities to work in machinery dealerships in the United States and Canada.

The boys also gained "coalface" experience in parts, service and sales with a timely reminder from mum to ensure clean premises at all times.

According to Bill, Pam has played an important role in the business even though she has no official title.

"She keeps everybody on their toes to ensure we present our business well to the public and she is busy with numerous tasks including planning business trips," Bill said.

"And she has injected good Christian principles into the family."

With more focus on succession planning in the 1990s, triggered by ageing parents desiring to give way to more youthful exuberance, regular family meetings set a course and a target date.

"A lot of people hang on for too long," Bill said. "We didn't want to do that because you've got to give your kids an opportunity, otherwise they lose their drive."

At succession meetings, all issues were placed on the table, including how the business should be structured without Bill and Pam.

"We always tried to bring forward disagreements," Bill said, "particularly on issues such as fairness.

"We've maintained that their wages, for example, should reflect what they are doing and that it can't simply be a three-way cut.

"There's more emphasis on performance-based rewards, taking responsibility and learning from failures."

According to Pam, family disagreements are always resolved.

"I think the biggest thing is forgiving people and treating each other with respect because it builds a harmony in the family and becomes a strong foundation," she said.

"We're very fortunate the boys get on with each other and they still come to our house to talk with us about the business or to hold meetings between themselves."

According to Bill, another key to successful succession is having an independent financial adviser and over the year the Boekeman family retained the late Peter McGuire.

“Peter talked with the boys, handled any dissensions and brought it up at the meetings,” Bill said.

“We were never big borrowers; I never believed in it and it has brushed off on the boys.”

What also has brushed off is maintaining a loyal staff.

An example is Stewart Harrison, who has worked for Boekeman Machinery for 35 years while Colin Riggs has notched 30 years.

Bill and Pam have relinquished their ex-officio positions on the family board.

“The boys still have regular meetings at our house (located next to the dealership) but we don’t interfere,” Bill said.

So what’s in store for two energetic septuagenarians?

While the legs and heart and mind are strong, anything is possible.

But not starring in a re-run of My Three Sons.

MACHINERY NOTE: Bill was a member of the inaugural executive committee of the FMDA in 1977. He served as vice president of the association from 1996 to 2002, when he became president, a role he filled until 2004.

In 1996 he was awarded the John Lynn Award and in 2012 became a life member of the association and he is currently a member of the executive of the re-named Farm Machinery & Industry Association.



Former FMDA President, Bill Boekeman and his wife Pam celebrate 35 years of the Association’s history.

From a garage to a top dealership



DeRosa Highway Motors Waroona principals Nick (left) and Tony DeRosa are celebrating 45 years in business this year. The pair started out servicing cars in their father's garage and in little over a year had secured the Sperry New Holland farm equipment franchise. Today they are one of New Holland's leading hay equipment dealers.

Sometimes you need to retrace history to remind yourself that hard work brings success.

In this case it involves more than 50 years of history associated with two brothers, Nick and Tony DeRosa, Waroona, principals of DeRosa Highway Motors, which is one of the leading New Holland hay equipment dealerships in Australia.

In 1968, it would have been hard to bet a dollar that Nick and Tony would make a fist out of a business servicing cars from their father's garage.

You would have lost that dollar in the first 12 months and a double or nothing bet would have been lost the following year when the brothers secured a Sperry New Holland franchise and built the existing premises on a block north of the town site.

They even became a sub-agent for a nearby Ford vehicle dealer and had a small showroom with new cars and farm equipment on display.

Working seven days a week with Nick's wife Barbara running the office, the pair quickly established a rapport with local farmers who were impressed with their knowledge and after sales service.

The pair has served their mechanic apprenticeships under then Waroona machinery dealer Charlie Iseppi, who later moved to Harvey to establish a Massey Ferguson dealership after owning the Waroona Ampol garage.

Nick remembers when he was 15 years old, taking charge of the garage on weekends when Charlie was away on a trip.

"I had to balance the till on Saturday and Sundays as well as selling petrol and spare parts," he said. "It was a great grounding for me for our business because I took to the administrative side while Tony concentrated on the servicing side."

Tony also showed his carpentry, welding and manufacturing skills when the brothers' new premises was built.

"I did all the trusses and doors because I liked building," Tony said. "But in those days Nick and I we did everything because you had to get things done."

Today, Nick runs the dealership and Tony runs the family farm south of the town.

"We've got about 150 head of cattle and a few sheep and we make about 1500 rolls of hay a year which is mainly sold," Tony said.

Apart from the farm, Tony helps out with any engineering work needed at the dealership and also runs the school bus which the business bought five years ago.

Nick is frequently seen on farm testing out new tractors and hay equipment.

"It's a good place to do a bit of work and it also helps when you're selling product to be able to relate to other farmers how the gear works from first hand experience," Nick said.

Nick and Tony have built DeRosa Motors into a quality machinery dealership employing between 12 and 15 people (at times up to 21) with integrated manufacturing, welding and automotive workshops and a comprehensive spare parts and oil department.

The business also holds franchises for Kuhn, Howard, Marshall, Lely, Hardi, Agrowplow and Hustler products.

As the brothers head into the twilight of their careers they lament the lack of skilled labour in the industry.

It's a factor that will keep the brothers working hard for a few more years.

A history back to the Gums



Esperance machinery dealer principal Brian Kerr (left) with his father Paddy checking out a Massey Ferguson 4840 4WD tractor, which used to be one of the company's flagship tractors in the early years of big broadacre farming in Australia. Brian is a third generation machinery dealer following in the footsteps of Paddy and Paddy's father Bob who started a dealership in Salmon Gums in 1929.

Esperance machinery dealership P H Kerr can trace its history back to 1926.

It was in that year that Mrs Olive Kerr set up a boarding house-come post office and cafe in Salmon Gums while the family farm was being developed.

In 1929 when Olive decided to return to England, Bob Kerr took over the business which at that time was named O'Kerr and Co and was selling H V McKay horse-drawn reapers.

By 1938, the business had changed to R E Kerr with diversification to transport and mechanical service.

In 1941, Bob died of pneumonia and his wife Annie Vera took over and named the business A V Kerr.

That business continued until 1966 when Annie's son Paddy took over the business.

Paddy, who was born in 1932, remembers finishing his school years after the war at Norseman and completing an apprenticeship as a fitter and turner and working in the

Norseman mines until 1966 when he returned to Salmon Gums to take over the business from his mother and the business underwent another name change to P H Kerr and Co.

In the early 1970s he became an official Massey Ferguson dealer and in 1985 he took over the Esperance Massey dealership, while retaining the Salmon Gums outlet, which was eventually closed down in 1989. The family farm was sold in 1999.

And in 1999, Brian Kerr took over as dealer principal from his father after managing the Salmon Gums agency for a number of years while running the farm.

For Paddy, his career as a Massey Ferguson dealer holds many memories during an era when Massey Ferguson was a household name in WA.

"It was a very reliable tractor and very versatile for tough jobs as the country was being developed," Paddy said. "There's no doubt Masseys carried the business along with the farm in those days."

Massey Ferguson still recognises P H Kerr as one of its oldest dealerships.

While there were many tough years, the acquisition of Massey Ferguson by Agco in the mid 1990s finally gave us a more complete product line which included Gleaner Headers and Fendt Tractors and as they say the rest is history.

Massey Ferguson tractors, swathers, balers headers, mowers, Fendt tractors and Gleaner Headers have been the backbone of the business since the mid 90s.

In 2004, Brian established new premises, located next door to the original business office.

"Because of the expanding product range and the need for service and back-up there was a need for a more professional commitment to the industry," Brian said. "We have increased our staffing level to 14 and built new administrative offices and sheds to accommodate our growth."

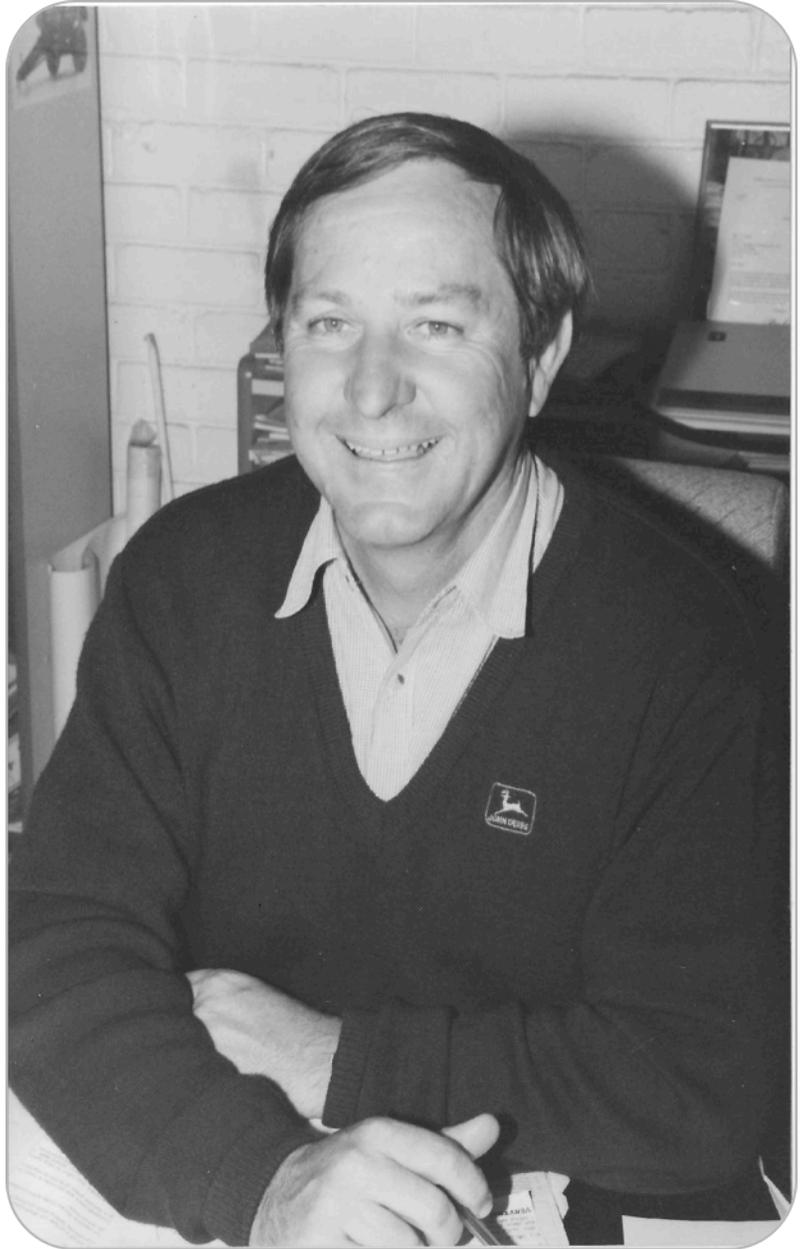
The company also has expanded to Katanning where it has set up a branch with the focus on Massey Ferguson, Gleaner and Fendt products.

"The Massey name is back in broadacre farming and we see exciting opportunities throughout our sales area in the Great Southern area," Brian said.

But while there's a lot of newness about the business, Brian said old-fashioned service and integrity continued to be the company's underlying focus.

From little things, big things grow

Being an original is obviously part of the DNA of former Merredin machinery dealer Max Carson. As Telfer and Carson, it was one of the original Chamberlain Tractors and Sperry New Holland dealers, apart from being one of the original Holden dealers in the bush. Company dealer principal Max Carson, (pictured right), was a member of the original committee which met at Parliament House on May 31, 1977 to discuss the formation of the FMDA – a precursor to a more formal inaugural meeting in June of that year at El Caballo Blanco, Woorooloo.



Along with Max were Don Hosken, Alan Parsons, Colin Manly, Ian Bolto, Tom James, Peter Staines, John Lynn and the Hon C Masters, MLC, R F Williams, MLA and A A "Sandy" Lewis, MLC.

"Sandy was the driving force along with John Lynn," Max said. "The talk around that time was the heavy-handedness of machinery manufacturers in not treating dealers fairly.

"So it was felt a more unified voice would be more beneficial for WA dealers."

Having Sandy, a former dealer himself, in the corridors of political power was a big plus a the fledgling body and Max recalls how dealers used to meet regularly at Parliament House in one of the many meeting rooms to discuss business.

“Sandy would always take us into the Members’ dining room for lunch after our morning meeting and then we would resume our business in the afternoon,” Max said. Understandably, the afternoons meetings were often very lively.

As a machinery dealer, Max oversaw the development of a highly successful eastern wheatbelt machinery dealership.

It all started after the Second World War when Max’s father Gilbert married Ruth Telfer in Merredin and joined forces with Ruth’s brother Stewart to form a businesses called Telfer and Carson.

Originally the company were agents for Sydney Atkinson Motors, selling Chevrolet cars and the Canadian-made Maple Leaf trucks.

Then with the advent of the Australian-made Holden, Telfer and Carson were awarded a franchise by General Motors Holden.

Further growth occurred in the 1970s when a young Peter Griffiths representing Chamberlain Tractors approached Telfer and Carson to take on the WA-made Chamberlain tractors range.

In a quick trip around the wheatbelt, Peter also signed up Wally Parnell, Gnowangerup and John Lynn Trayning.

(During the 1980s Chamberlain became a fully owned subsidiary of John Deere, and began trading as Chamberlain John Deere. Peter later became managing director of John Deere Australia before the company moved its headquarters to Crestmead, south of Brisbane in 1993).

When Max was 16, his father died of a heart attack, changing Max’s career direction back to the bush.

“Dad left the business to all his four children – not just the boys – and his wife, and initially I worked in the business to help out the family as I was completing a commerce degree at the University of WA,” Max said.

“I would work Monday to Wednesday at uni then the rest of the week for the dealership with my brother Bruce in charge.

He was 20 at that stage and was the youngest person to hold a GMH franchise, with my mother and uncle in trustee until he turned 21.

“I became more and more involved and eventually it came to a point in 1977, with the introduction of payroll tax that we decided to split the business into motor cars and farm machinery divisions, to defray from of the tax costs.

“The cars traded under Telfer and Carson and the machinery under Carson’s Machinery.”

In the 1980s, a severe economic downturn placed a lot of stress on the two businesses but as fortune would have it, Perth car dealer Young's Holden head-hunted Bruce to run its business in Perth.

"That left me as the dealer principal of two divisions until Bruce died at 42 and in 1990 I became sole owner with my wife Liz."

The 1990s saw an acceleration of technological growth including the halcyon years in which Max became the world's biggest Flexi-Coil dealer.

"In one year I sold 74 serial numbers," Max said. "It was a very exciting period from 1996 to 1998 and we won several awards from the company apart from being on its top 10 dealer list for those three years."

According to Max, his dealership career was an experience he savours as one of the most exciting times in the history of agriculture.

"As machinery dealers we were involved in rapid changes in technology going from the work up and back and seed days to the one pass seeding," he said. "It brought with it wider bars, bigger bins and higher horsepower 4WD tractors and, of course, the spraying revolution which allowed the one pass system.

He believes the success of his business can be described in one word: Service.

"This business has always been about people," he said. "It's a basic core belief of business, of you like, that if you provide good service, you'll be rewarded with good customers.

"Another part of our success was to always be fully engaged in the community.

"We sponsored various clubs in the towns and always encouraged staff to be part of a wider family of friends.

"It was always great to see your kids running around with the staff's kids and I've always held the belief of treating people well to get the best of them in business hours."

Max now owns and operates SupaCoat, a Welshpool-based powder coating operation.

Standing firm as a dealer

Ironically, one of the major reasons for forming the FMDA – inequity in manufacturer-dealer relations – saw the then Telfer and Carson, Merredin, lose out to John Deere.

"As Chamberlain dealers we sold tractors, ploughs and scarifiers, with a line of hay balers from New Holland," Max said.

"Because Chamberlain didn't sell hay gear, they thought it was a good fit for us to have a fuller line of equipment to sell.

"Then New Holland merged with Sperry Rand, which made headers and we started selling Sperry New Holland headers.

"In 1970 John Deere bought a controlling interest in Chamberlain and their attitude was markedly different and we were told to get rid of the Sperry New Holland franchise.

"We resisted for a number of years until finally we dropped the franchise in the 1980s when Chamberlain became a fully-owned subsidiary of John Deere."

The rise and rise of dealerships

Max also recalls the urgings of the then University of WA agriculture sector professor Dr Henry Schapper, to "get big our get".

"It was in the 1980s and we were seeing a lot of aggregations of farms," Max said.

"Much like we see today, farmers were buying out neighbours' farms and this was a time when machinery dealers' territories also expanded.

"Our dealership established branches in Southern Cross, Mukinbudin, Bruce Rock and expanded territory to Kellerberrin to cater for this growth.

"Generally good seasons saw a focus on farmers buying the latest in new machinery and it led me into a liaison with several other John Deere dealers to establish a company from which we could grow equity and also plan an exit strategy when the time came for us to leave the industry.

"The company was called Agro Machinery and when we floated it we were oversubscribed.

"We expanded into NSW but in the first year, we were hit by drought, which obviously severely impacted on sales and profit projections.

"Consequently, without support from the banks, we had to liquidate the company in 2001.

"It was a concept that would have worked but nature and a series of linked events proved the downfall."

Chatty, an oldie but a goodie



Brian "Chatty" Chatfield (right) pictured here with fellow salesman Graeme Hyde at the Case-IH stand at the 1996 Dowerin Machinery Field Days.

Brian "Chatty" Chatfield is one of the oldest FMDA members still in active service". At 70, he remains an integral part of the Busselton dealership, Busselton Machinery, though he is content with fixing mechanical problems and "running the rabbit" for his dealer principal son Steve and marine division manager son Andrew. Succession plans are complete and he is at liberty to enjoy Scroungers Day at the local golf club. Brian started his career in 1959 as an apprentice diesel mechanic for the then Department of Civil Aviation (DCA), graduating in 1963. It was a trade that held him in good stead throughout his time as a machinery dealer honing his skills at the DCA's Mt Lawley workshop and at airports throughout WA. Born in Cunderdin, he returned there in 1964 to work for the local Ford dealer, servicing Fordson and Ford tractors.

After nine months, an opportunity arose with Case dealer Vic Halbert who was looking for a sales and service representative.

It was my first introduction to sales and Case tractors," Brian recalls. I did a lot of field work on the services side because there weren't many country dealers at that stage. Winterbottom Motors held the distribution rights for Case but they didn't do too much on the service side.

After a three stint with Vic, Brian struck out on his own.

The local Massey Ferguson dealer Reg Bolland offered Brian a workshop from which Brian worked as an independent mechanic servicing Case and Massey tractors, Then in 1968 when Vic decided to forego tractors in his business, Case asked Brian to take on the franchise.

"I became one of four Case dealers in WA with the others in Perth, Narembeen and Koorda," Brian said.

"I remained an independent Case dealer even in 1972, when Wesfarmers took over the State distributorship of Case to add to their David Brown line-up of tractors.

"And Case wanted me to remain independent too so all my equipment came by rail from Adelaide.

"I remember one train carried 32 Case tractors and it was quite a site pulling up at the Cunderdin railway station."

Brian's success saw him expand his dealership when Case wanted him to start up a business in Geraldton.

But it wasn't always the proverbial beer and skittles for Brian as competition from Wesfarmers remained, through the not-so-subtle relationship it had with farmers.

"It was difficult in those days because the cockies had stock and grain accounts with Wesfarmers and that tie-up saw me lose of bit of business," Brian said. "But the cockies would come to me when their tractors needed servicing."

The difficult period continued when in 1985, Case acquired International Harvester. Roy Purcher was the International dealer in Geraldton, so Case gave him the nod to continue and told Brian he could have the Cunderdin franchise, which at the time belong to Ken "Eli" Baxter.

"Eli was my second cousin and when the news was announced that he had lost the International brand, it split the town," Brian said. "Eli and I have remained firm friends which is testament to Eli's character and the way he dealt with such bitter news."

In 1991, Brian diversified the business, buying the Busselton Case IH and Fiat dealership from Laurie Flatters and in 1992, Brian appointed his son Steve as manager of Busselton Machinery.

Brian continued as a Case IH dealer in Cunderdin until he sold the dealership to fellow Case IH dealer Peter Hutton, who was expanding his Merredin business.

"My wife Wendy and I came down to Busselton to join Steve and Andrew in the business, which had morphed into a New Holland dealership after Case IH and New Holland merged to become CNH in 2000," Steve said.

Brian joined the FMDA executive in 1983, the first year of John Jolly's presidency and remained an executive member until 2000.

In the 1990s, he served a period as vice president.

Recalling his life as a dealer, Brian said it was an exciting and satisfying life.

"Service was the king to a dealership," he said. "That's what makes sales.

"You don't need to be flashy salesmen.

"In our day it was the strong relationships you built with farmers and the fact you were straight with them.

"In many ways there was no other option because in the small communities, you would be playing golf or footy with them and meeting them at social occasions.

"To a degree, some of that has been lost but I suppose other generations will argue their way is the best.

"But I hope we can continue to attract new people into dealerships and give them chances like I got to make a fist of a career.

Being a machinery dealer is a challenging life but it also brings with it many rewards."

An original still carrying the torch

Current FMDA executive member Greg Humphries is the only remaining active member of the original executive formed in 1977. His unbroken run has seen him serve as president of the association twice (1983-84) and 1994-1995).



Greg Humphries played an important role in promoting careers in agriculture for young students, especially in machinery dealerships.

He also served twice a vice president and was awarded a life membership in 2010. He was also a recipient of the John Lynn Medal for services to the farm mechanisation industry.

Greg started his career working for International Harvester as a zone manager before purchasing a business from Ron and Vic Hill (Hill Bros, Corrigin) in 1974.

The business was renamed Road and Field Services, in January of that year with Greg taking the role of dealer principal.

In 1982 it became Interline Sales Pty Ltd.

Greg quickly grew the business through his friendly nature and product knowledge and divided up a lot of his weeks usually in the dealership or helping the local shire council or attending a FMDA meeting.

"I remember the first meeting to form the FMDA at El Caballo Blanco was a really big deal," he said. "Our soon-to-be secretary Sandy Lewis, being a politician, organised for some high profile businessmen to attend along with some of his Liberal Party mates.

"It was a time when we dealers really needed to be united against manufacturers who were dictating what they wanted without due regard to the needs of the dealers.

"We initially started meeting every two months in the Liberal Party meeting room in Parliament House, starting in the morning, breaking for lunch in the parliamentary dining room, then resuming in the afternoon.

"Needless-to-say, the meeting got better in the afternoon with everybody contributing their view after a suitable primer at lunch time."

Interestingly, many of the issues debated in the early days mirror today's issues.

"Industrial relations was a big one from the start," Greg said. "There was a lot of red tape filling in compliance forms along with such things as sales tax exemption forms.

"Most dealers complained at the extra hours of work needed to get the paper work out of the way before we actually started work to make some money."

During his first presidency, a lot of time was consumed representing WA at national FMDA meetings.

"It was a good idea to have a national body with one voice through which we could approach politicians on various issues, such as import duties and the need for more uniform transport and safety regulations," Greg said.

"WA was very active but there wasn't the same passion among dealers in the Eastern States and there became a growing inevitability of a fractured body that soon failed to be the right vehicle for WA dealers to progress their industry."

Greg also lived through the experience of an era starting in the late 1990s when manufacturers were targeting a template for so-called Super Dealers.

"Basically manufacturers of all colours wanted fewer dealers with more focus on large sales and service centres," he said.

"There were a few dealer expansions and it may become the way of the future but I wouldn't like to see less than four dealers of any colour in WA.

"I believe you have to maintain competition and choice."

Greg sold his business to fellow Case IH dealership Hutton and Northey, Merredin, in 2008 and now leads a more relaxed lifestyle in Corrigin, including regular sessions at the local bowls club.

Enthusiasm counts for everything

Brenton Aughey's career in the farm mechanisation industry almost finished before it got started.

But the short story before that was his life in Boyup Brook and memories of a school bus being driven by Mr Lewis – a man he would meet in later life as Sandy Lewis, secretary of the FMDA.

"I finished school and by 21 I had started a career as a wool buyer, which progressed very well for four years," Brenton recalled.

"Then I had an opportunity to buy Hotker's Rural Centre in Wagin in 1980. This dealership was the second oldest Sperry New Holland dealership in WA after Mick Laycock's Quairading Service Contractors (now FarmPower) at Quairading."

That was the start of Wagin Machinery, with Brenton taking up the role of dealer principal on July 1, 1980.

But by August 1981, he had signed a Part 10 Bankruptcy Act form owing \$33,000 to creditors – the result of a combination of high interest rates which reached 27% on used machinery finance, a harvest severely hit by frost and being a novice in the industry.

Under Part 10, he was able to buy time to sell off his used machinery inventory and get some cash into the business. However the terms of trade were daunting, he was allowed to continue operating the business but he had to pay for everything in cash up front while he still gave credit to his customers.

Brenton repaid his creditors dollar for dollar estimating a total cost of \$48,000 with legal fees included.

In those monies to the receiver were the proceeds of two Massey Ferguson self-propelled headers (a MF587 and a MF850) that Brenton sold in to South Australia. The eastern states trade has thrown a lifeline to WA dealers many times over the pursuing years.

"I remember giving the cheque to the receiver the night I got it," Brenton said. "That whole episode was the biggest lesson of my life."

Brenton remembers the first FMDA meeting he attended, which was held at the Sheraton Hotel in Perth in 1981.

"One of the major topics was the continued friction between dealers and manufacturers," Brenton said. "It revolved around what dealers got paid for warranty work because many times the manufacturer wouldn't pay anything and it was always a confidential discussion between the dealer and the manufacturer if any reimbursement money was paid by the manufacturer."

The issue continued on a slow burn and during the 1990s, the FMDA's legal adviser John Picton-Warlow declared if a product failed the manufacturer had to pay.

"And I think even today if the ACCC (Australian Competition and Consumer Commission) looked at the warranty policy of manufacturers the ACCC would rule the manufacturer or importer had to pay to the total cost of repair. The dealer is stuck between a rock and a hard place. More often than not the manufacturer is the dealers major supplier and if the dealer were to take legal action to get full restitution for warranty work then the relationship between that supplier and the dealer would probably be jeopardised, threatening the dealers financial viability. At the end of the day dealers are still writing off \$1,000's of dollars on warranty work."

"But it has been muddied by legal ramifications and various other pieces of legislation that can make warranty claims null and void."

Brenton joined the FMDA executive committee in 1988 and won the John Lynn Memorial Award in 1995 for services to the industry.

One of Brenton's passions was to encourage youth into the industry and he was involved with Bill Boekeman, Greg Humphries, Geoff Perkins and other members of the FMDA board in setting up a pseudo-dealership at the Narrogin Agricultural College. John Henchy was also heavily involved on behalf of the TMA. The new training centre had an administrative wing, a parts and service counter and several service bays. It was one of the best training centres in Australia to teach young people mechanical, sales and service and administrative skills appropriate to the training course in which the students were involved.

The course gained recognition and accreditation from educators but according to Brenton, politics between teaching institutions vying for students and government grants saw the centre, proverbially, die on the vine.

"The FMDA continued to push for improved training and to lobby for skilled labourers and in the early 2000s, executive members Greg Verburg and Greg Humphries went to South Africa to explore the possibility of importing labour into WA dealerships because the shortage of skilled labour was a concern," Brenton said.

"But in those days we had no 457 visas and no visionaries in government to assist with our idea.

"Ironically when I sold my dealership in 2008 to Greenline AG, I had secured three 457 visas which lapsed because of the sale."

At that stage Brenton was a John Deere dealer having moved from New Holland in 2001 and renaming the business AgWest Machinery. It was about this time that he built new premises in Wagin.

Another issue which Brenton credits the then secretary Sandy Lewis for resolving centred on the Goods and Sales Tax, which was introduced in July 2000.

“It was the start of a new financial year but every dealer had parts stock and there was real confusion over whether the GST was applicable to that,” Brenton said.

“The government had ruled that all dealers would have to pay 10% GST on the parts stock dealers were carrying. Most dealers were looking at a new bill of between \$100,000 and \$200,000 that they owed the government but Sandy got it overturned which was a big win for FMDA members.”

When Brenton left the industry in 2008, his vision for himself and wife Raylene was to track the Grey Nomad trail but with a zest for business, he bought a sign-writing company before being presented with another opportunity early in 2013 to join John Deere dealership Ag Implements (AIM) in Merredin as branch manager.

He and Raylene moved to Merredin and both started work at AIM in April.

Returning to his roots, Brenton says service to customers still remains king.

“Half the secret to selling is being a good listener,” he said.

An interesting observation by Brenton, looking at the relationship between dealers and manufacturers today is the lack of communication from the manufacturers.

Dealing in the northern zone

Former Kalannie machinery dealer Graeme Bunney was one of the original executive members of the FMDA, representing the northern zone with Ballidu dealer John Jolly. Graeme remembers a time when new land farming was expanding in the Kalannie and Goodlands districts and the almost insatiable demand by farmers for parts and equipment.

“I started with Ken Hathway in January 1965 as Hathway and Bunney, selling Massey Ferguson tractors,” Graeme said. “We also had the Chrysler and Dodge franchises and it was around those times that the Chrysler Valiant motor cars and Dodge trucks were in vogue.

“I used to drive one when visiting farmers and when we also did the district mail runs.

“It was on these mail runs that we often sold equipment and I remember one year we had a group of 10 farmers in the Goodlands district and we sold nine Massey Ferguson headers and all bar one of them, bought Dodge trucks, some buying two of each.

“In those days there were no phones so as we did the mail run, we took orders.

“I remember one special package was \$10,000 for a Dodge 690 truck with an 18 foot tray and a 14 foot, 100 bushel PTO Massey header.

“I sold quite a few Dodge trucks travelling in a Valiant through Kalannie and Goodlands to Beacon, Moora, Dalwallinu and Wubin.

"We sold Valiants to local doctors, the vet and chemists and various professional people.

"The standard for farmers was to own a Valiant Regal wagon."

In December 1965, Ken Hathway decided to move to Perth and after a very successful year, Graeme joined up with Bob Symington, to become Symington and Bunney. It didn't take long for the two enthusiastic dealers to expand to Dalwallinu in September 1970.

"People told us we'd go broke," Graeme said. "It was the days of the wheat quotas and there was plenty of competition around from other dealers.

"Max Jeans was the original Chamberlain dealer before Ian McPherson bought him out and Ian later sold to John Jolly, who was in Ballidu until they moved to Dalwallinu in 1972, as JK Sales.

"We outlasted most of them except for John who became a successful John Deere dealer in the town and later expanded to Koorda and Wongan Hills."

According to Graeme, because of the competition among dealers, service became a key factor in building a faithful clientele.

"There was a lot of camaraderie in those days and Bob and I worked seven days and were available 24/7 to help our clients," he said. "Sometimes they'd push it a bit far like the times when they would come into town, have a good time at the pub then wake us up at some ungodly hour to get fuel to get back to the farm.

"It was that sort of relationship that you built in those days and it helped you sell machinery, vehicles, parts, tyres and fuel."

In the 1973, Graeme and Bob took on the Versatile franchise, much to the chagrin of Massey Ferguson.

"It was really the start of multi-franchising by dealers," he said.

In 1980, Graeme sold out in what he regarded as a timely move when Massey Ferguson hit troubled times and Bob Symington went to Geraldton to work with Wongan Hills dealer Ian McIntosh, who was expanding to Geraldton.

In the ensuing years Graeme has carved out a successful career in real estate and now lives in Bindoon.

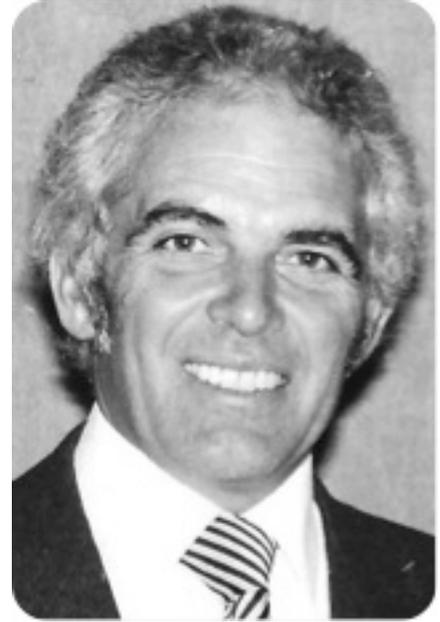


Bob Symington (left), pictured here with salesman Alan Gartner, was a successful dealer principal in Geraldton for the McIntosh & Son dealership group after a successful partnership with Graeme Bunney in Kalannie, trading as Symington and Bunnev.

Passion and energy for a life's work

One of the most passionate and energetic machinery dealers over the years was Ian Bolto.

Interestingly, Ian is recorded as the seconder of a motion Moved by John Lynn, to form the Farm Machinery Dealers Association (FMDA). The son of Peter Bolto, who started a machinery agency in Katanning in 1951, selling Morris cars and Nuffield tractors, Peter also was involved in real estate as a licensed valuer, like his father. It didn't take long for young Ian to become interested in machinery and real estate and was well on the way to following his father's and grandfathers' footsteps by the time he was in his twenties. He remembers starting the learning curve of a machinery dealer selling Massey Ferguson tractors in the early 1960s when Peter Bolto & Co gained the Massey franchise.



A dapper Ian Bolto serving his last term as FMDA president.

Later, in the early 1970s, the Katanning dealership became the first Versatile tractor dealers in WA at a time when NSW farmer Colin Uebergang was importing the tractors and had set up a small depot in Geraldton.

"It was the decade when big 4WD tractors started to make their mark and it was almost a prestigious thing to own either a Versatile or Steiger tractor," Ian said.

"It was around that time when direct drilling was starting to become fashionable and many farmers would use high horsepower 4WD tractors to pull double hitch combines or wider seeding bars that covered 30 feet in one pass.

"Forty years later we're seeing the emergence of bars with 90 feet working widths."

Ian: When did Ian Bolto & Co come into existence?

In the quest for more productivity, Ian was always on the lookout for new technology and in the early 1990s became the first WA dealer to introduce the JCB Fastrac tractor to the State.

“He was a familiar exhibitor at the Dowerin machinery field days and did an outstanding job promoting the features of the JCB to a wide audience of farmers throughout the State, such that JCB franchises were quickly snapped up by other dealers.

“It was a totally new tractor at the time,” Ian said. “It had full suspension, was capable of travelling at 80km/h, it had full air braking and all the electrics.

“The early models weren’t designed for the tough Australian conditions, but JCB was quick to realise that and later models became very popular for the Australian market.

“I think one of the hallmarks of its success was that it was a family-owned company and family members were always intimately involved in ensuring any problems gained their full attention.”

According to Ian, being a member of the FMDA executive – he served three terms as president (1981-82 and 1989-90 and 1991 - 92) was rewarding, helping to promote the farm mechanisation industry.

“In my time, one of the biggest issues was getting bureaucrats to understand farming, particularly when it came to transport rules,” Ian said.

“I credit (Corrigin dealer) Greg Humphries and (then secretary) Sandy Lewis as the main ones that spearheaded the FMDA to gain changes.

“It was the same energy and drive that saw the FMDA win a battle against the tax department.

“Sandy and I had to explain the machinations of valuing trade machines which was an eye-opener to the tax officials who thought they were in for a big tax bonanza.

“Fortunately through the FMDA’s intervention, machinery dealers were saved from paying millions of dollars of extra tax.”

Ian, like many of his colleagues, also was involved in almost weekly spats with the Department of Occupational Safety and Health.

“It was always trying to convince bureaucrats of the common sense issues that surrounded farming and dealerships, in regard to safety,” Ian said. “There was an attitude by safety inspectors that we needed stricter laws to keep us from hurting ourselves and they became almost a police force unto themselves.

“Fortunately the strength of the FMDA was persuasive in bringing some common sense into the department.”

As a machinery dealer, Ian also valued his community and serves on the Katanning shire council committee for 16 years from the early 1980s to 2002.

He also served as president of the Farm Machinery Dealers Association of Australia. As a licensed valuer, he also managed a successful real estate business with his wife Leonie and son Cameron, who continues in real estate as a fourth generation representative of the Boltos. Leonie also served on the FMDA committee and was elected a vice president.

MACHINERY NOTE: Ian continues to work as a licensed valuer throughout the State and many times is asked by farmers for advice on choosing a machine at the right deal. "They might come to me and say, 'I've got a deal from such and such a dealer that is \$30,000 better than my local dealer; should I go for it?' "And I would say to them, who do you trust to help you out at 10 o'clock at night during seeding or harvest. "Inevitably they say they would trust their local dealer. "They might not get the same deal from him, but what they get in service and the value they get for their trade, which is serviced by their local dealer, is far more than the \$30,000 they might save on a deal."

Stories from the Cross



Former Southern Cross Traders dealer principal John Williamson (left) with his wife Betty, receives a John Lynn Memorial Award from FMDA president Kevin Jones at the 2009 FMDA annual conference.

A recipient of the John Lynn Memorial award for his contribution to the industry, John Williamson was one of the larger than life characters among his peers. He was dealer principal of Southern Cross Traders until he retired in 2009 after selling his business to Merredin farmer John Nicoletti, who also owned John Deere dealership Merredin Ag Implements. John started his dealership in 1956 after a stint in a grocery business following five years with Dalgety's in Roebourne. "It was a very tight time in the late 1950s and into the early 1960s," he said. "But then we had a good run between 1963 and 1968 which was a boom time for us. "I remember in 1964 we sold 42 Massey Ferguson headers." In the 1970s, John became involved with selling Steiger tractors through John Shearer and became an official Steiger dealer in 1974. "That was the year Malcolm Fraser introduced a 20 per cent investment allowance. "I think we ended up selling 142 Steigers from 1974 onwards. "It has been an exciting time and when you think where we've come from since 1956 it's mind-boggling to think what will happen in the next 50 years. "Farmers will probably be sitting in their office pressing buttons and tractors will have no drivers."

The Super Dealer network

A viewpoint by CJD Equipment managing director Rob Jowatt.

There is an inevitability of the continued aggregation of machinery dealers into what has become known as the Super Dealer network.

As manufacturers strive to improve cost efficiencies, their collective preferred template sees a dealer network operation based on economies of scale, with a central base from which sales and service are delivered to satellite districts.

Whether it is a good move will be for history to judge.

Ironically, history could also provide a wise counsel to manufacturers heading down the Super Dealer pathway.

During the 1960s and 1970s, CJD director Rob Jowett, then a territory manager for Chamberlain Industries, saw the growth of a huge Chamberlain Industries' dealer network throughout Australia, numbering 160 dealers.

It included 46 WA dealers dotted through the Wheatbelt, mostly in small towns.

Chamberlain Industries, arguably more than any other manufacturer at the time, set the benchmark for dealer training and support.

And the Chamberlain ethos is a salutary lesson for shareholder-focused companies today.

"The business of agriculture is about people," Mr Jowett said. "And in those early days, Chamberlain recruited the type of people who played a pivotal role in their community.

"Many dealers initially were general store owners and became agents for Chamberlain.

"They were generally leaders in their community and were involved in the business and social dynamics that contributed to a vibrant country life."

Mr Jowett holds up inaugural FMDA president John Lynn as an outstanding example of the calibre of Chamberlain dealers.

"John Lynn operated out of a tin shed at Yelbeni," Mr Jowett said. "Chamberlain encouraged him to go to Trayning to expand his business and eventually he established branches at Bencubbin, Mukinbudin and Yelbeni.

"He was a great sportsman and represented WA in hockey while playing cricket and football at Yelbeni and Trayning.

"I believe a huge part of his success as a machinery dealer stemmed from the fact that he engaged people and it is a practice which reflects the success of many businesses today. "In many ways, it is hard to duplicate the owner/dealer and that will be one of the challenges facing companies evolving towards a Super Dealer network in the future. "It was a source of great comfort to the farmer to know somebody was close by to help him with a problem, particularly during seeding and at harvest.



Chamberlain Industries pioneered tractor manufacture in Australia from its WA Welshpool factory.

"That's the type of service that is getting harder to replicate in an era where we are enduring a declining skills base while technology advances are rampant."

Mr Jowett also recalls the big shake-out of dealers during the so-called wheat quota years, which started in 1969 and was repealed in 1981.

"The devastating economic impact on farmers of course produced the ripple to businesses, particularly manufacturers and machinery dealers and Chamberlain was forced to seek a financial partner," he said. "It resulted in John Deere taking a major interest in Chamberlain in 1970.

"At that time, most John Deere distributors were Caterpillar dealers in each State and were terminated with the merger of Chamberlain Industries and John Deere.

"So by aligning itself with Chamberlain, John Deere inherited 160 Chamberlain dealers throughout Australia to give them a major footprint in the Australian market, and virtually overnight the new organisation of Chamberlain John Deere became market leaders.."

A truck, a farmer and a gun

A recollection by former FMDA president Bill Boekeman.

I remember in the early 1970s it was an increasing practice for farmers to offer to buy machines with the promise of payment after harvest.

This would usually be in January.

Interest rates were climbing, especially on second hand machines, sometimes going to around the 20 per cent mark.

Providing the asking price was promised, often no interest was charged on these deals.

About the mid 1970s, I had a new truck on floor plan which has been in the dealership for nearly a year, with hardly any inquiry.

It was, as the saying goes, burning a hole in my pocket, especially with interest charges.

I had a customer who became interested in it before harvest but he was known as a slow payer and he had no deposit to give me.

So he offered me a deal.

He would take the truck for harvest then when he received crop proceeds we would finance the truck on hire purchase with 25 per cent deposit and the balance over several years.

I could see a way out of my problem, so I let the truck go.

After harvest came and went, I received no payment and I could do nothing to get my money.

I was desperate.

I heard tell of a chap who operated as a recovery agent for finance companies and at that time there was a lot of slow payers.

I contacted him, as I had in fact offered the customer to take the truck back, which he wasn't interested in doing while still not coming up with the money.

The recover fellow wanted \$1000 payment upfront then \$1000 on producing the truck. The deal was set.

Within two weeks I had my truck back.

I discovered later he had a revolver and was licensed to carry it.

In fact, he actually stole the truck from the customer.

I hid the truck for a month, when the customer became very aggressive with me, assuming what had happened.

Subsequently I sold the truck.

I think all I learnt from the episode was that it's a fairly tough world out there.

Don't touch the buttons dad

Observations of an old timer.

Milestones in the history of the farm mechanisation industry have never come at such a pace as in the current century.

And even machinery dealers will admit to finding it hard to keep tags on all manner of technology, seeking specialist staff to explain the almost unexplainable workings of a computer and associated software.

For the younger generation, who have been baby-fed on DVDs, I-phones, I-pads and Apps, technology is a breeze.

But for ageing machinery dealers, it's a sometimes begrudging necessity to understand new-fangled terms like variable rate applications, satellite mapping, telematics, Real Time Kinematics, Isobus-compatible, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), CORS networks, EM38 farming, virtual terminals, WAAS and EGNOS steering and NTRIP-capability.

Thankfully, design engineers, have come up with familiar touch-screen consoles in the machinery cab with step-by-step instructions to pre-set a myriad of commands which are then dutifully carried out by a computer.

It is truly the age when veteran machinery dealers can pass on the technology baton to their younger peers.

Gone are the days of the mechanical fix in the paddock, with the farmer and machinery dealer equipped with a wrench, screwdriver or even hammer, to restore the "old girl" to her former glory.

Today's technology is such that even ageing farmers happily embrace sitting in the spray tractor and watching the console as boom sections automatically cut out on already-sprayed areas to alleviate over-lapping.

And the joy of sitting in a header and experiencing hands-free steering while watching auto sieve adjustments, auto grain monitoring and yield mapping is a world away from the old days.

And there's the bonus of no "tin soldiers", such is the accuracy of the swaths.

But in some cases – in the earlier days of precision farming -- the bliss of a quiet tractor cab has sent many old farmers into the land of nod, only to wake up with the header or tractor escaping through a fence or trying to mount a tree.

And when things go wrong with computers and you're stuck out in the middle of a paddock far from the homestead, remember the wise words of your son: Don't touch any buttons dad!

But the lure of being a home mechanic can be too powerful sometimes to pay any attention to sons.

Just unscrew the console, check out the wiring and the connections with the looms and in most cases you end up with a spaghetti-like mess of wires in the cab and facing the subsequent ire of the budding boss of the farm muttering expletives as he calls the machinery dealer to get a technician out pronto to fix "a bloody mess".

Tribute to a dealer

(Attributed to WA New Holland service manager JACK WOODHEAD, 1968)

There is a little village,
a little west of here,
where lives an NH dealer, George,
who really gets into gear.

It's just an average farming town,
just another place,
where merchants said that things were bad,
and walked around long of face

They said couldn't sell a thing,
no deals upon the hook.
But they hadn't let George know,
That things were bloody crook.

He met his clients day by day,
with good deals every time.
He sold machines, now, as before,
when things were in their prime.

He sold conservation,
And many a hand he shook.
Yes, they forgot to tell poor George,
That things were bloody crook.

He traded used machinery,
all there was about.
Serviced them sold them again,
and duly sent them out.

The accountant cam to George one day,
to study on the book.
He looked and told smart George, at once,
that things weren't bloody crook.

So when things are going slowly mate,
or so they would appear,
The thing to do is be like George.
Get into bloody gear.

The red tape brigade of bureaucrats

One of the most enduring aspects of the FMDA was its efforts for a “fair go” for its dealers.

Countless times, the association would confront issues where it felt the government – or more accurately, bureaucracy – had got it wrong.

The following stories provide an insight into some of the issues, many of which resulted in legislation being changed by the government of the day when poor laws or rulings hindered or prevented a dealer from carrying on his business.

Vehicle licensing

The Farm Weekly newspaper, in 2011, reported on this issue thus:

WA machinery dealers are breaking the law every day, risking insurance cover and placing themselves in a position to be sued.

Literally their businesses are an accident waiting to happen.

It’s the result of out of date legislation covering vehicle licensing, specifically dealer plates, which are used mainly to deliver vehicles to a purchaser after a sale.

But a crackdown by police and Department of Planning and Infrastructure (DPI) inspectors over the last 18 months has seen several dealers have their plates confiscated.

And despite efforts by the DPI in alerting police and inspectors to take a softer approach,

Farm Machinery Dealers Association executive officer John Henchy said a “blitz” is continuing with dealer plates being confiscated.

“The latest incident happened last month after Wagin Woolorama where a dealer and a manufacturer’s representative both had plates taken off them and infringement notices issued,” he said.

At the heart of the matter is an interpretation by some police, DPI and Main Roads inspectors of the Road Traffic Licensing Regulations Act (1975), that a tractor, combine harvester, self-propelled sprayer or swather are not compliant vehicles (not licensable) for travel on public roads and therefore should not be allowed to carry dealer plates.

The interpretation is that such vehicles should be transported by a low loader or towed by a licensed vehicle.

Mr Henchy said DPI called for public submissions last year with a view to submitting a draft to the State Government to amend the Act.

"We gave them our submissions 12 months ago and we haven't heard back," he said.

"When I called them they said they would contact me but I still haven't heard from anybody.

"We followed the process but it seems the wheels have fallen off."

Mr Henchy said he had "no idea" why police and DPI inspectors were targeting the use of dealer plates.

"When you look at the DPI website a bulletin is available on guidelines for the use of dealer plates," he said. "If the police, DPI and Main Roads were to better understand the guidelines we would not be continually harassed."

Current Minister for Transport Simon O'Brien says he is aware of the issue facing machinery dealers and manufacturers.

"I have asked my department to look into what can be done on the regional use of dealer licensing for non-conforming machinery such as tractors and other implements," he said.

That reply didn't wash with Greenline Ag director Blue Charlesworth who said it was nonsense for businesses to be liable for insurance and liability claims in the event of an accident.

"We have the situation of having to move tractors, headers and sprayers parked across the road into our workshops every day," he said.

"If we are to follow the law, we need to get a low loader to take that equipment across the road," he said. "And if it is over width, such as a tractor on triple tyres, we need to get a permit from Main Roads, which takes 14 days.

"So effectively we are restricted from doing daily business because of a silly law which was written in 1975 that has no application for today's modern equipment.

"Our only alternative is to break the law if we want to move our equipment across the road.

"If there's an accident, our insurance cover is voided because the vehicle is non-compliant and if anybody is injured, as a director of the company, I am liable for damages."

"I have written to Minister O'Brien and (Police Minister Rob) Johnson outlying the absurdity of the laws and the fact we are not afforded the same concessions as our primary producer customers, who can use farm plates to travel across roads to different parts of their farm.

"But I have had no replies from either of them."

The upshot of this issue resulted in the government (Speak with John)

Let the battle begin

Another issue that created angst among machinery dealers was regulatory changes to the Motor Vehicle Repairers Bill, which placed more imposts on machinery dealers with a threat of heavy penalties for non-compliance.

For example, a mechanic not properly licensed by the Motor Industry Vehicle Board, could be fined \$50,000 for repairing a truck or a car.

The then FMDA president Geoff Perkins led a lobby group seeking changes to gain exemption.

According to Geoff, the FMDA has been caught under the umbrella of legislative changes to the Bill which requires stricter licensing of businesses and individual repairers.

Any mechanic (light or heavy duty) was required to be licensed by the Motor Industry Vehicle Board (MIVB) to repair trucks and cars and the requirement meant machinery dealers would be required to be licensed as a business of repair of trucks and cars.

The license fee for each mechanic would be \$65 a year while an unlicensed mechanic faced a penalty of \$50,000.

Under the Bill, a vehicle which was used principally for primary production was exempt, except where that vehicle "involves the carriage of persons or goods over public roads".

This meant that to repair grain trucks and trailers, a mechanic would require a repairer's license. And if a dealer chose to repair the truck, he would need a business license.

According Geoff, the regulations were another onerous impost on machinery dealers.

"This legislation has been written to get rid of backyard mechanics in the city and we're far from backyard," he said.

"In fact we're very much front yard and 30 per cent of our repair business is on licensed vehicles.

"The legislation not only requires us to now be licensed but also to comply with other regulations that involve more paper work and time.

"It's just another example of government pushing through laws that have not been well researched by bureaucrats.

"Nobody has come to us and talked about a sensible way for country businesses to comply.

"We just get lumped in with everybody else."

Geoff said among the regulations, included notifying the MIVB within 14 days of staff changes, with a \$2000 penalty for non-notification within that time.

The MIVB also had to be notified of new management appointments and the board had to agree to this person under penalty of losing a business license.

It also was an offence to make changes of management without the board's approval.

To gain a business license, a dealer had to gain approval to use his premises or to work outside his premises.

The board had to approve the premises and any additions or changes to the premises and could revoke that approval.

Under pending regulations, it appeared authorised inspectors had unlimited rights of entry.

According to FMDA secretary Sandy Lewis, the Bill was a copy of NSW legislation.

“I am told it has served no useful purpose except revenue raising,” Sandy said. “There has been no reduction in theft, no reductions in claims, and of course, it is unenforceable as back yarders can say they are helping out a mate for free.”

Sandy said the only bright note about the regulations was that it had to be reviewed every five years.

“We are speaking with as many politicians as possible to gain exemption from these onerous regulations,” he said.

Unfortunately representations proved fruitless and the Bill remains in force.

Inspectors jump the gun

Cuballing manufacturer Gordon McDougall, a past executive member of the WA Regional Manufacturers Association (WARM) was left scratching his head one day. In his absence, a Department of Occupational Safety and Health inspector had entered his premises and slapped infringement notices on a variety of machinery in his yard. Citing lack of proper safety measures that were obligatory on machinery, the inspector left thinking he had made a nice catch.

It didn't take long for his face to turn red when an angry Gordon rang the department complaining of infringement notices being placed on machinery that were in various stages of manufacture.

The ignorant inspector had assumed all the illegal” products were ready for sale. Anybody with a measure of knowledge of farm equipment would have immediately known the products were not completed with obvious safety components, such as shields and guards, yet to be fitted.

Needless to say Gordon had the last laugh but the incident emphasized the seriousness of the lack of education about farm machinery equipment by government agencies.

Standing for common sense

The FMDA has a succinct view of an Eastern States ruling by the NSW Industrial Relations Commission in 2001.

It was reported the Tractor and Machinery Association (TMA) was seeking funds from industry to launch a legal challenge against a ruling by the commission.

In a nutshell, the ruling made suppliers of machinery equipment liable for any accidents that may occur to people involved in the use of the machinery supplied.

FMDA secretary Sandy Lewis was dismissive of the ruling.

“We don’t believe any court would be stupid enough to pursue such a ruling,” he said.

“It’s like selling a car to a person who gets bogged in the desert and perishes and you blame the supplier.”

Needless to say the TMA didn’t get any support from the FMDA in its fund-raising drive and the issue faded away.

Red-taping a silo manufacturer

Bureaucratic red tape technically locked Kellerberrin silo manufacturer Moylan’s Silos from making deliveries in 2012.

The company had received a high load movement authorisation (permit) from Western Power restricting transport from the company’s factory gate along the exit road because the load failed to comply with height restrictions travelling under power lines. Company principal Mike Moylan, who applied for the permit to transport a silo from the factory to a client in Busselton, said height restrictions prevented him from legally leaving his premises.

The stated load height on the permit application was 5.1 metres with a prescribed route exiting west from the factory gates.

The Western Power permit “conformance information and restrictions” route stated the load must be 4.5m in height and exiting east to a road closed sign.

It was not an isolated incidence in the industry and according to Mr Moylan, if he followed the letter of the law, he could not access 80 per cent of his customers without employing Western Powers line lifters.

“Just lifting one line would cost \$4500 along with an observer who gets \$1428,” Mr Moylan said.

“That’s too expensive and would send us broke.

“We have some ideas we think could help alleviate a lot of the problems and it’s just a matter of sitting down with the people responsible for setting up the system and working through solutions that are fair to everybody.”

On the Moylan’s permit to transport to Busselton, Western Power imposed three height restrictions of 4.5m, 5m and 5.06m.

The restrictions forced machinery dealers and manufacturers to find different routes on back roads or simply “go for it and hope you don’t get caught,” as one manufacturer said.

To add the angst, in some cases, inspectors would camped out the front of a business waiting for a truck to appear with a load so it could be pulled over and the driver issued with a fine.

The newly formed Farm Machinery and Industry Association and its executive director John Henchy had plenty of sympathy for dealers and manufacturers.

Mr Henchy said he knew of machinery dealers carting equipment from Kewdale, faced an onerous task, with permits requiring loads to be lowered on various sections of routes.

“It’s almost impossible for them to comply when they have a load of say five metres in height and they must lower the load to say 4.2m,” Mr Henchy said.

Several machinery dealers said multiple load height changes were common when carting from Perth.

“Most of the time we can get under the lines but if it becomes a real hassle, we’ll pay Western Power to have an observer along the way,” one dealer said. “Technically we break the law on most trips but we shouldn’t have to be put in that position.

“The national code height is 5.5m and if Western Power raised lines to that height it would eliminate a lot of hassles to get the permits and costs.

“This has gone on for too long and people need to realise the burden on country businesses.”

Mr Henchy said had spoken without success to Western Power officials and the then Energy Minister Peter Collier.

“We find it hard to understand how WA can be a signatory to a national standard but still restrict road users to 4.3m,” Mr Henchy said. “We can only assume that Western Power is behind with an upgrade program to raise the power lines over roads to comply with the national standard.

“It is mandatory for a farmer to provide power lines with a minimum clearance of 5.5m when it goes across his or her land, but the same requirement does not appear to apply to Western Power when lines cross roads.

“If we were still back in the 1950s we would not have a problem but today machinery is getting bigger, in the interests of agricultural efficiency and some equipment, mainly air seeder rigs, can stand 6m tall when folded in the transport position.

“We are not saying that we should have that sort of clearance yet, but what it does say is that in overseas countries, mainly North America, where a lot of this equipment is manufactured, they don't appear to have the same sorts of restrictions.”

Mr Henchy said the FMIA had made several suggestions to Western Power to better assist its members.

“It appears that Western Power is uncomfortable in considering change,” he said. “For example the suggestion that they look at a web-based permit system is met with comments about budgetary restraints.

“We have put forward a suggestion about having High Load Escorts based in regional areas as opposed to having them come out at exorbitant rates from the city, but there seems to be a reluctance to let go of the present system because other people taking on the role may not be able to comply with Western Power requirements.

“There was never any suggestion the current system be watered down, it was done in the hope the \$1135 hourly rate (maximum) could be reduced.

“It just seems there is little willingness to change things.

“At the end of the day that may be the case but we would prefer to have the debate first rather than a it's-too-hard up front.”

Mr Henchy also suggested to Mr Collier that an improved system of permit authorisations by Western Power be implemented when over-sized loads entered territory managed by Horizon Power.

Mr Collier promised to address the issues raised by the FMIA and wrote to Mr Henchy in 2011 saying a response would be provided (by the Minister) by Friday, 3 June 2011. No response came and a subsequent letter sent on October 22 this year has also received no response from the Minister.

In that letter, Mr Henchy reminded the Minister of his statement in May 2011 that Western Power would introduce a web-based self-service facility to streamline the identification of line heights and road crossings throughout the South West interconnected system.

Mr Collier said at the time the system would be provided to external customers and would be implemented between 18 and 24 months from May 2011.

“Given that we are very close to the 18 month timeline are you able to let us know when we can expect access to this new facility?” Mr Henchy asked in the October letter.

Mr Henchy is still waiting for a reply in a classic example of a bureaucratic system out of sync with the agricultural industry.

From the FMDA archives

The survival of the dealers.

Many small farm machinery dealers are battling to survive despite the turnaround in machinery sales.

This was the stark evaluation given by Farm Machinery Dealers Association secretary Sandy Lewis at a special conference in Melbourne in 1988.

During the conference Sandy announced that results of a 1987/88 Cost of Doing Business survey into the operations of Australian farm machinery dealers.

The survey has highlighted that dealers are currently selling only 30 per cent of pre-1983 levels while making only 25pc of the profits they should be achieving in real terms.

Dealers in the under \$2 million turnover group saw their nett operating profit drop from \$12,000 in the 1986-87 calendar year to \$3618 in 1987-88.

In 1983-84 the figure was \$40,614.

In contrast, bigger dealers have enjoyed an upswing reflecting the higher prices for new equipment.

Those in the \$2-\$4 million turnover range finished with an average net operating profit of \$49,233 compared with \$1138 the previous year.

In 1983-84 the figure was \$54,749.

And there was a significant lift for dealers in the \$4m plus turnover range with an operating profit of \$231,681.

This compared with \$14,865 the previous year.

In 1983-84 the figure was \$1,163,865.

In the used equipment area, the average margin is down 1.5pc with sales costing the dealer \$10,000," Sandy said. "Spare parts are down 130pc on 1987 which amounts to an additional \$8770."

Sandy said many dealers with a 25pc gross margin and an average spare parts turnover of \$635,421, would only make a \$6270 profit.

"These figures are extremely poor," he said.

Soaring second-hand gear prices concern

The then president of the FMDA in 1988, Terry Nichols, wrote this article in *Western Farmer and Grazier*, previewing WA's machinery field days.

Field day time is here again and farmers are keen to inspect the wide range of new machinery available to help them in efficient production.

This season has had a great start and adequate follow-up rains and it is seen in most of the central/eastern and northern wheatbelt as the best start yet.

The Farm Machinery Dealers Association is concerned with reports from members that the availability of second hand equipment is causing many farmers to re-assess or delay their purchases.

It says second hand gear is rising in price to the point where new units must be considered.

The shortage of second hand equipment will mean more people will not be able to upgrade.

For these people, the best decision has been made to upgrade and the best solution is to bite the bullet and order new equipment.

Timing of new equipment purchases is critical as all original manufacturers are now producing only to dealer order.

To ensure delivery of new product from overseas, the farmer must commit himself as soon as possible.

One dealer says a new unit ex-USA ordered in June will not be available until February 1989.

The organisation says there should be a tax incentive investment allowance on all funds used to upgrade farm equipment.

This would mean both new and used gear would attract the incentive.

The State FMDA annual conference decided to join forces with the Amalgamated Mutual Workers Union to bring pressure to bear on the Federal Treasury to introduce a tax incentive on Australian-made goods.

The action was debated at length and it was decided to associate with the metal trades workers as it may be a good alternative as the rural vote did not seem to hold any favour in Canberra.

Farming today is a way of life for some people but it is only those who temper this with good business sense who are still in a position to enjoy this idyllic lifestyle.

These business farmers are the most efficient producers in the western world.

Australian farmers are recognised as the most successful dryland wheat farmers in the world today.

There is, however, a point which must be recognised by governments and farmers alike – the upgrading of farm machinery is not desirable but an economic necessity.

To allow the national farming plant to become too old would be a disaster in the long term.

Farmers generally recognise this, and would, if the economic climate were right, buy new and second-hand gear.

It is the government which must recognise this fact and ensure adequate incentives are in place to stop the demise of Australia as the most efficient wheat producers in the world.

The FMDA asks farmers to speak to their Members of Parliament, State or Federal, and ensure the message is heard in the right places.

A major problem for the farming community is again raising its head: unscrupulous private importers trying to undermine the solid business foundation that has built up between dealer and farmer.

The sweet taste of a price cut for imported machinery may seem attractive but it should be noted:

- . These units are usually old stock and do not have fitted current factory updates or changes.
- . Spare parts may be incompatible to Australian-sold units.
- . Dealer service will usually be non-existent as the private importer does not offer it.
- . Resale value will usually be affected if options, considered standard equipment in Australia, are not fitted.

An accelerated depreciation scheme

On February 25, 1990, FMDA secretary Sandy Lewis wrote to the then Prime Minister Bob Hawke:

My Dear Prime Minister,

My Association has asked me to write to you and urge that an accelerated depreciation scheme be introduced for all income-earning plant.

The feeling amongst members is that this move would encourage purchasers and go a long way to halting the exodus from rural towns.

This exodus has been particularly severe since June, and my members along have had to put off 300 staff in Western Australia.

The Association's scheme would involve only the amount of cash spent, not the total price of the plant sold, which makes it different from previous schemes.

An example would be:

Tractor \$45,000
Trade-in \$25,000
Balance \$20,000

The depreciation would then be allowed on the \$20,000, and our belief is that it should then be on both new and used machines.

Hoping that this scheme could be given consideration,

Yours faithfully,

Sandy Lewis.

FOOTNOTE: Prime Minister Hawke never replied to Sandy's letter leaving the issue as a proverbial "dead duck".

The FMDA Logo

The distinctive Farm Machinery Dealers Association (FMDA) logo was the result of a competition run by the FMDA of WA through all the State high schools, public and private.

The FMDA offered \$500 for the winning entry.

It attracted 200 entries and the competition not only provided interest to the children involved but also to their parents who were made aware of the formation of the association.

The competition produced some distinctive designs which formed the basis for the official FMDA logo.

Contributing to the health of communities

The history of the FMDA not only promoted a united voice among its members but also a vigilance to assist the wider community.

In the big droughts of the 1980s (1982-83), the FMDA moved to help people in regional areas as this minute from the then FMDA secretary Sandy Lewis records: The FMDA intends to run a seminar to coincide with its annual meeting on, "Possible methods of reducing the effect of drought and other forms of natural disaster on rural communities and business".

This last year (1983) has brought home to all sections of the rural community, from farmers through to manufacturers, how devastating the effect of droughts can be. As all sections of Australia have been hit in the last 12 months, the seminar will have speakers from many of these areas.

The aim being not to tell each other what happened or go over the past but to put into a simple form the thoughts of those present of what could alleviate some of the pain in future situations that are similar to those we are facing now.

The idea came from a similar series of small meetings that the association ran in rural WA several years ago, which unfortunately got zero response from either side of politics.

In politicians' minds, it is as if the problem will go away if you do nothing.

The idea of not trying to find someone to blame, but to endeavour to set up some workable formula that can apply to all or most situations.

This would need to be on a regional basis and the administration flexible enough to get help where it was needed as fast as possible.

A disaster, whether it be drought, flood, fire, frost, etc, is as hard on the individual as for say 500.

Over the years we have had numerous disasters and always the help needed has been too slow – one occasion that it was not was Cyclone Alby (1978) when the late Sir Desmond O'Neil had people being helped the next day – and thus governments have to have people, probably volunteers, ready to assess the situation as soon as possible. These people would have direct access to the Prime Minister and the Premier in their respective State.

Surely a mechanism can be drawn up in each State in a by-partisan manner and the best possible people approached to give their time.

This, with luck, would over-ride the inter-agency rivalries and get help to the "coal face" as quick as possible.

The FMDA aims to be constructive in this matter and continue the leading role it has in rural areas.

The matter of government involvement in assisting agriculture remains a vexing issue for the farm mechanisation industry, which recognises the need for a broader vision to maintain a healthy agribusiness sector.

Sadly, political parties have failed to establish such a vision, continuing with short term policies that fail to address long term solutions.

The growing bureaucratic beast

(A report from the 2010 FMDA annual general meeting published in Farm Weekly).

Clearing sales remain a largely unregulated minefield with serious legal ramifications for sellers.

According to CR Management Systems managing director Warren Mills, who addressed this week's FMDA and WARM meeting, most machinery should have to be declared unsafe until ratified as safe by a competent source.

"Gone are the days when you can use the caveat emptor or buyer beware," he said.

"It's gone.

"You are supposed to know what is safe and what is not safe.

"And selling a machine on an "as is, where is" basis is a grave risk.

"If you sell a machine, you should need to have a certificate of sale with disclosures citing the level of danger of the machine and the level of risk and liabilities if the machine is not used properly."

Mr Mills said chain of responsibility laws were clearly laid out under Occupational Safety and Health regulations where "you no longer have to wait for an accident to be prosecuted".

"You can be prosecuted for a breach of the guidelines," he said.

"We now live in an era where duty of care is clearly enshrined in all sorts of legislations, including the WorkSafe Act.

"The bottom line is that if somebody involved with a machine has an accident or dies, you can be sued (if you are under chain of responsibility)."

Mr Mills told dealers they must determine what a machine is being used for, particularly if it was a used machine, because a manufacturer's liability lapses after three years.

"So a dealer must determine if it's fit for its determined purpose," he said. "And a dealer must also determine the risks and ensure safety controls are present, such as ROPS, safety guards, warning decals, operator hand books, etc."

Mr Mills said there were a range of precedents reflecting liability.

"You can be prosecuted and it can be in a multitude of ways, including facing courts in the Eastern States, where there are different interpretations on safety."

Mr Mills said there was a push for national uniform safety legislation which would untangle a lot of interpretations but machinery dealers needed to ensure they followed correct procedures.

To this end, Mr Mills had devised a HazCheck system for dealers to enable them to "tick off" safety requirements before selling machines.

"It's basically a system that tells you what to do and enables you to assess used machinery and keep records of compliance which can be used in any defence action."

The buck for the truck stops with the farmer

(A report published in Farm Weekly following the FMDA's 2008 annual general meeting).

Machinery dealers will pass on new cost imposts for transporting high machinery loads (above 4.3 metres in height) to farmers.

At last week's FMDA annual general meeting, dealers were told Western Power now required \$100 to be paid for each permit granted for high load transport.

Previously such permits were free but Western Power decided to impose the charge, effective June 9, to offset administration and road survey costs.

While the cost of the permits will be paid by machinery dealers, it will be passed onto farmers. A Western Power spokesperson said farmers also would be required to pay for permits when transporting on roads identified with low hanging power lines.

The issue raised questions on the upkeep of power lines in country areas and the impost on dealers.

Several dealers complained that they could not transport equipment on certain roads because of restrictions by Western Power.

Jolly and Sons dealer principal Ken Jolly said that to send a combine harvester from Dalwallinu by road to Northam meant deviating through Perth.

"You can't go a direct route because on some roads power lines are too low," he said.

AgWest Machinery, Wagin dealer principal Brenton Aughey said a transporter had to consult with Main Roads for nearly a day to find a route between Southern Cross and Frankland River to transport an airseeder.

"We need maps to show us designated roads," he said. "The whole exercise is very time consuming and costly in terms of labour and fuel costs and now we've got to pay \$100 every time we transport machinery to a farm or pick up a trade."

FMDA secretary John Henchy said it was clear dealers had only one option and that was to pass on the cost to farmers.

On the industrial front

One of the most enduring aspects of the FMDA was its efforts for a “fair go” for its dealers.

Countless times, the association would confront issues where it felt the government – or more accurately, bureaucracy – had got it wrong.

The following stories provide an insight into some of the issues, many of which resulted in legislation being changed by the government of the day when poor laws or rulings hindered or prevented a dealer from carrying on his business.

Let the battle begin

An issue that created angst among machinery dealers was regulatory changes to the Motor Vehicle Repairers Bill, which placed more imposts on machinery dealers with a threat of heavy penalties for non-compliance.

For example, a mechanic not properly licensed by the Motor Industry Vehicle Board, could be fined \$50,000 for repairing a truck or a car.

The then FMDA president Geoff Perkins led a lobby group seeking changes to gain exemption.

According to Geoff, the FMDA has been caught under the umbrella of legislative changes to the Bill which requires stricter licensing of businesses and individual repairers.

Any mechanic (light or heavy duty) was required to be licensed by the Motor Industry Vehicle Board (MIVB) to repair trucks and cars and the requirement meant machinery dealers would be required to be licensed as a business of repair of trucks and cars.

The license fee for each mechanic would be \$65 a year while an unlicensed mechanic faced a penalty of \$50,000.

Under the Bill, a vehicle which was used principally for primary production was exempt, except where that vehicle “involves the carriage of persons or goods over public roads”.

This meant that to repair grain trucks and trailers, a mechanic would require a repairer’s license. And if a dealer chose to repair the truck, he would need a business license.

According to Geoff, the regulations were another onerous impost on machinery dealers. "This legislation has been written to get rid of backyard mechanics in the city and we're far from backyard," he said.

"In fact we're very much front yard and 30 per cent of our repair business is on licensed vehicles.

"The legislation not only requires us to now be licensed but also to comply with other regulations that involve more paper work and time.

"It's just another example of government pushing through laws that have not been well researched by bureaucrats.

"Nobody has come to us and talked about a sensible way for country businesses to comply.

"We just get lumped in with everybody else."

Geoff said among the regulations, included notifying the MIVB within 14 days of staff changes, with a \$2000 penalty for non-notification within that time.

The MIVB also had to be notified of new management appointments and the board had to agree to this person under penalty of losing a business license.



Cuballing manufacturer Gordon McDougall tangled with the Department of Occupational Safety and Health after an inspector errantly slapped "unsafe for work" stickers on yet-to-be-completed plant.

It also was an offence to make changes of management without the board's approval. To gain a business license, a dealer had to gain approval to use his premises or to work outside his premises.

The board had to approve the premises and any additions or changes to the premises and could revoke that approval.

Under pending regulations, it appeared authorised inspectors had unlimited rights of entry.

According to FMDA secretary Sandy Lewis, the Bill was a copy of NSW legislation.

“I am told it has served no useful purpose except revenue-raising,” Sandy said. “There has been no reduction in theft, no reductions in claims, and of course, it is unenforceable as back yarders can say they are helping out a mate for free.”

Sandy said the only bright note about the regulations was that it had to be reviewed every five years.

“We are speaking with as many politicians as possible to gain exemption from these onerous regulations,” he said.

Unfortunately representations proved fruitless and the Bill remains in force.

Inspectors jump the gun

Cuballing manufacturer Gordon McDougall, a past executive member of the WA Regional Manufacturers Association (WARM) was left scratching his head one day. In his absence, a Department of Occupational Safety and Health inspector had entered his premises and slapped infringement notices on a variety of machinery in his yard. Citing lack of proper safety measures that were obligatory on machinery, the inspector left thinking he had made a nice catch.

It didn't take long for his face to turn red when an angry Gordon rang the department complaining of infringement notices being placed on machinery that were in various stages of manufacture.

The ignorant inspector had assumed all the illegal” products were ready for sale. Anybody with a measure of knowledge of farm equipment would have immediately known the products were not completed with obvious safety components, such as shields and guards, yet to be fitted.

Needless to say Gordon had the last laugh but the incident emphasised the seriousness of the lack of education about farm machinery equipment by government agencies.

Standing for common sense

The FMDA has a succinct view of an Eastern States ruling by the NSW Industrial Relations Commission in 2001.

It was reported the Tractor and Machinery Association (TMA) was seeking funds from industry to launch a legal challenge against a ruling by the commission.

In a nutshell, the ruling made suppliers of machinery equipment liable for any accidents that may occur to people involved in the use of the machinery supplied.

FMDA secretary Sandy Lewis was dismissive of the ruling.

"We don't believe any court would be stupid enough to pursue such a ruling," he said.

"It's like selling a car to a person who gets bogged in the desert and perishes and you blame the supplier."

Needless to say the TMA didn't get any support from the FMDA in its fund-raising drive and the issue faded away.

Battling the bureaucrats

Bureaucratic red tape technically locked Kellerberrin silo manufacturer Moylan's Silos from making deliveries in 2012.

The company had received a high load movement authorisation (permit) from Western Power restricting transport from the company's factory gate along the exit road because the load failed to comply with height restrictions travelling under power lines. Company principal Mike Moylan, who applied for the permit to transport a silo from the factory to a client in Busselton, said height restrictions prevented him from legally leaving his premises.

The stated load height on the permit application was 5.1 metres with a prescribed route exiting west from the factory gates.

The Western Power permit "conformance information and restrictions" route stated the load must be 4.5m in height and exiting east to a road closed sign.

It was not an isolated incidence in the industry and according to Mr Moylan, if he followed the letter of the law, he could not access 80 per cent of his customers without employing Western Powers line lifters.

"Just lifting one line would cost \$4500 along with an observer who gets \$1428," Mr Moylan said.

"That's too expensive and would send us broke.

"We have some ideas we think could help alleviate a lot of the problems and it's just a matter of sitting down with the people responsible for setting up the system and working through solutions that are fair to everybody."

On the Moylan's permit to transport to Busselton, Western Power imposed three height restrictions of 4.5m, 5m and 5.06m.

The restrictions forced machinery dealers and manufacturers to find different routes on back roads or simply “go for it and hope you don’t get caught,” as one manufacturer said.

To add the angst, in some cases, inspectors would camped out the front of a business waiting for a truck to appear with a load so it could be pulled over and the driver issued with a fine.



Kellerberrin silo manufacturers Corey (left) and his father Mick Moylan battled the bureaucrats in 2012 when it became apparent “red tape” prevented them from transporting silos out of their premises.

The newly formed Farm Machinery and Industry Association and its executive director John Henchy had plenty of sympathy for dealers and manufacturers.

Mr Henchy said he knew of machinery dealers carting equipment from Kewdale, faced an onerous task, with permits requiring loads to be lowered on various sections of routes.

“It’s almost impossible for them to comply when they have a load of say five metres in height and they must lower the load to say 4.2m,” Mr Henchy said.

Several machinery dealers said multiple load height changes were common when carting from Perth.

"Most of the time we can get under the lines but if it becomes a real hassle, we'll pay Western Power to have an observer along the way," one dealer said. "Technically we break the law on most trips but we shouldn't have to be put in that position.

"The national code height is 5.5m and if Western Power raised lines to that height it would eliminate a lot of hassles to get the permits and costs.

"This has gone on for too long and people need to realise the burden on country businesses."

Mr Henchy said had spoken without success to Western Power officials and the then Energy Minister Peter Collier.

"We find it hard to understand how WA can be a signatory to a national standard but still restrict road users to 4.3m," Mr Henchy said. "We can only assume that Western Power is behind with an upgrade program to raise the power lines over roads to comply with the national standard.

"It is mandatory for a farmer to provide power lines with a minimum clearance of 5.5m when it goes across his or her land, but the same requirement does not appear to apply to Western Power when lines cross roads.

"If we were still back in the 1950s we would not have a problem but today machinery is getting bigger, in the interests of agricultural efficiency and some equipment, mainly air seeder rigs, can stand 6m tall when folded in the transport position.

"We are not saying that we should have that sort of clearance yet, but what it does say is that in overseas countries, mainly North America, where a lot of this equipment is manufactured, they don't appear to have the same sorts of restrictions."

Mr Henchy said the FMIA had made several suggestions to Western Power to better assist its members.

"It appears that Western Power is uncomfortable in considering change," he said. "For example the suggestion that they look at a web-based permit system is met with comments about budgetary restraints.

"We have put forward a suggestion about having High Load Escorts based in regional areas as opposed to having them come out at exorbitant rates from the city, but there seems to be a reluctance to let go of the present system because other people taking on the role may not be able to comply with Western Power requirements.

"There was never any suggestion the current system be watered down, it was done in the hope the \$1135 hourly rate (maximum) could be reduced.

"It just seems there is little willingness to change things.

"At the end of the day that may be the case but we would prefer to have the debate first rather than a it's-too-hard up front."

Mr Henchy also suggested to Mr Collier that an improved system of permit authorisations by Western Power be implemented when over-sized loads entered territory managed by Horizon Power.

Mr Collier promised to address the issues raised by the FMIA and wrote to Mr Henchy in 2011 saying a response would be provided (by the Minister) by Friday, 3 June 2011.

No response came and a subsequent letter sent on October 22 this year has also received no response from the Minister.

In that letter, Mr Henchy reminded the Minister of his statement in May 2011 that Western Power would introduce a web-based self-service facility to streamline the identification of line heights and road crossings throughout the South West interconnected system.

Mr Collier said at the time the system would be provided to external customers and would be implemented between 18 and 24 months from May 2011.

“Given that we are very close to the 18 month timeline are you able to let us know when we can expect access to this new facility?” Mr Henchy asked in the October letter.

Mr Henchy is still waiting for a reply in a classic example of a bureaucratic system out of sync with the agricultural industry.

Saga of the Dowerin field days

THE annual Dowerin Machinery Field Days, which first started in 1965, remains the centrepiece for exhibiting agricultural machinery in WA.

Largely supported by FMDA members and manufacturers, it has grown into one of Australia's top machinery field days.

But the event has been the focus of much angst by exhibitors over the years trying to hold an event of significance for farmers at which machines were demonstrated and farmers were provided with a hands-on experience.

The main bone of contention revolved around the field days' committee desire to attract city people to the event and turning a machinery exhibition and demonstration day into a fair.

For years the FMDA members, particularly, bristled at changes that were perceived as catering more for the public than exhibitors.

Stormy meetings were held between the FMDA and the Dowerin committee and at one stage the FMDA threatened to boycott the event.

Interestingly it reached a crescendo in 2006, reflected by this report of the 2006 FMDA annual general meeting by Farm Weekly machinery editor Ken Wilson.

He wrote: The Dowerin Machinery Field Days will become just another country show as the farm mechanisation industry moves to a more targeted approach of its customers.

That in a nutshell is the sum of the most discussed topic at last week's FMDA and WARM annual general meetings.

Frustrated delegates vented their feelings at the way Dowerin formats the field days in favour of catering for and promoting a growing urban audience.

"City people aren't our customers," Primary Sales director Allan Fisher said. "Field days will have continuing impact if they become specialised like the old days.

"We want ag. exhibitors only, with a smaller audience and more time to talk with them.

"We've tried to get the field days committee to reform the event but they won't listen.

"We want time to speak with farmers because our equipment is more technical and it takes time to get the messages across.

"We want a focused machinery event without Perth exhibitors."

Dongara manufacturer Peter Nunn, Nufab Industries, said he could not justify the cost of attending the field days.

"I am looking at more focused events where I will get a greater return on what I spend," he said. "It's not just me and we already are seeing a trend of thinking away from field days.

“John Deere doesn’t attend field days anymore and they have set a trend.

“Dowerin is fast approaching just becoming another country show.

“We’ll go to smaller events and combine with dealers to hold demo days so we can achieve a better customer focus on our products.”

FMDA president Geoff Perkins said he believed field days in general had just about run their race.

“I’m disappointed and frustrated with Dowerin and while they’ve updated facilities they haven’t done anything about our requests.

“With more sophisticated machinery, there is a need for more in-depth conversations with farmers and that’s becoming harder to do at field days.”

Corrigin dealer Greg Humphries, Interline Sales, said he was not interested in Dowerin.

“We look after our own customers with ride and drive days and promoting customer focus days,” he said. “That is the direction all dealers are heading.”

At the time Geoff Perkins was quoted after the meeting as being resigned to the status quo.

“It’s basically up to members if they want Dowerin to fizzle,” he said of the long-running saga of criticism of the Dowerin field days.

Mr Perkins said the association was resigned to the fact that it could not make any impact on changing the format of the field days.

“We wanted a more machinery-focused event over two days and it’s not going to happen,” he said. “But we can’t instruct our members not to attend Dowerin.

“If they want to protest they can either not show up or just stay for two days, or do whatever they like.”

Former FMDA executive member Brian Chatfield recalls some heated meetings within the executive over the subject of the field days.

“At one stage, (FMDA secretary) Sandy Lewis wanted to pull members out of the event,” Brian said.

“The basic reason was Dowerin had dropped the ball in promoting machinery and was turning the event into a more fairy floss-style event.

“It was generally felt throughout the industry that we needed to get back to the core purpose of the field days which was to showcase and demonstrate machinery.

“I was in favour of a refocus by the committee but not pulling members out.”

Talk at the time that several FMDA and WARM members would lobby for a new machinery event to be run by the organisations with a focused format on machinery technology and held at a central country location, possibly Northam, never materialised.

The following year at the 2007 AGM, Dowerin was again spotlighted by the WA Regional Manufacturers Association (WARM) because mining exhibitors were invited to attend.

The pith of the WARM argument was that Dowerin, having agreed to emphasise the field days as a farm machinery event, had given more promotion to the mining content of the field days.

“Is it a mining expo or an ag event?” one delegate asked during the association’s annual general meeting in 2007, held in conjunction with the FMDA’s AGM.

“There’s a lot of emphasis on mining in the advertising (for the event).”



Despite the grumbles about how exhibitors were treated at the Dowerin machinery field days in 1998, the New Holland boys always out on a smile. From left, Baxter’s Rural principal Ken Baxter, New Holland territory manager Tony Hicks and FarmPower dealer principal Mick Lavcock.

As far as WARM was concerned, the field days should have reverted to a stricter format involving farm machinery and suppliers.

At least one delegate wanted to hold a separate event at Brigadoon arguing cost benefits for manufacturers and superior accommodation for visitors.

Unfortunately, or fortunately, depending on your point of view, the topic was destined to die on the vine.

Most members of both associations agreed there was minimal cost benefit attending field days, a point manufacturers had identified years ago and quietly put the onus on their dealers to carry their flag and the costs.

Happily the Dowerin committee has attempted to placate the machinery fraternity exhibiting at Dowerin while balancing their desire to take ag to the city and encourage visitors to the field day.

The event remains but every year "grumbles" are heard from exhibitors about the cost and focus of the event.

Farm mechanisation from basic roots

For almost as long as agriculture has been practised in this State, there has been some form of representative infrastructure for the “outputs” side of the industry.

And while the focus was on marketing boards, farmers’ associations and machinery dealers, it took until the 1980s before the first rudimentary thoughts of a body to represent the robust farm machinery manufacturing sector crystallised.

Early pioneering manufacturers included Pederick Engineering, established in Wagin in 1928 by Clifford Pederick.

The company was integral to new-land clearing with heavy duty equipment such as ploughs, pin-wheel root rakes and manufacturing land-clearing equipment and grew its business in Wagin until shifting to Darkan in 1988 where it still operates a vibrant business.

Cuballing-based McDougall Weldments, which opened its doors in 1960 and developed the famous McDougall transportable sheeppens, is still operating.

And during the 1980s and early 1990s, other companies sprung to the fore including Fabcast Foundry and Engineering, Primary Sales, Nichols Concaves, Fusion Engineers, Symonds Engineers, Phillips of Merredin, Inland Sales and Service, Nufab Industries, Beverley Hydraboom, Sonic Boomsprayers, Moylan Grain Silos, Burando Hill.

All manufacturers and others to follow set a high standard in manufacturing and in some cases, produced world-leading products.

In 1985, a like-minded group of manufacturers formed the Agricultural Manufacturers Association (AMA).

The members realised their diverse activities and geographical spread needed some form of unity if they were to have a voice in matters which affected their role as suppliers of manufactured goods and/or services to the agricultural sector.



The early days proved a struggle with difficulties found in their efforts to build membership to a level where the relatively modest subscriptions could afford the fees involved for a meeting venue.

Meanwhile, the elected representatives volunteered their time and efforts to organise activities such as attendance as a group at Eastern States field days where fledgling WA companies could be assisted to venture into markets outside their home State in order to build their business base.

Attention to the various items of business affecting the group such as regulations, opportunities, threats and liaison with governments, were all held by the members themselves, very often at the expense of time spent on their own businesses, so that the good of the industry was served.

Eventually, however, the pressures of their own business needs and the time and expense of travel to meetings from throughout the Wheatbelt led to a gradual lessening of energy and time able to be given to the AMA and it fell into desuetude. It did not take long before the truly important purposes of the organisation again came to light and, with a relatively short amount of time to re-charge their energies, many of the original members rallied to give the cause another try and the AMA (Mark II) was re-formed.

Despite a sterling effort, the second attempt again succumbed to "volunteer burn-out" and although the need remained there was an acceptance that it had run its course under this structure.

The State Government expressed concern at this second demise as it had come to appreciate the convenience of dealing with one body representative of the many regionally-based businesses which would otherwise need to be dealt with individually and it saw reason to offer assistance.

In 1991, John Love of the Small Business Development Corporation (SBDC), approached the former president and secretary of the AMA (Charles Peaty and Alan Fisher respectively) seeking a meeting to discuss ways in which the corporation could provide the limited support needed to allow an inputs representative body to be again formed.

Little more than a meeting venue and secretarial services provided at no cost were all that were necessary to rekindle the support needed to get such a body underway for a third time. A new constitution was drafted and approved and the West Australian Regional Manufacturers Association (or WARM) was inaugurated in June 1991.

Mr Ian Bent, a strong and supportive member, took up the role of coordinator and with the assistance of John Love and the support of the SBDC, the WARM group was underway.

It quickly set about organising its agenda and with the promise of recognition of its exhibitor members as "Guest State" at the Yorke Peninsula Field Days later in the year,

it had a practice run by attending the Dowerin Machinery Field Days as a WARM group of exhibitors in August that year.

Both efforts gave highly satisfying results for the members and this helped the group transition to a basis where it was able to levy its members a more substantial subscription fee in return for membership benefit savings which easily justified their cost.

At this point, John Love took up another position and SBDC's Reg Fox took up the supporting role.

Given the limited time frame of the SBDC assistance initiative, it was contingent on WARM to achieve self-sufficiency as soon as possible and a helpful synergy in this aim was found when an approach was made to the Farm Machinery Dealers Association (Inc.) to share their secretariat costs and hold combined meetings.

This made eminent sense, given that both organisations were regionally-focused and many of the manufacturer members of WARM already dealt through FMDA members. The now joint secretary, the Hon. A.A. (Sandy) Lewis, a former machinery dealer from Boyup Brook and later a noted parliamentarian, proved an ideal standard bearer for both groups and the notion of having a comprehensive coverage of all inputs from the genesis of a product idea through to its development, manufacture and distribution through the dealers to the end-user, was born.

Some years later, and with much progress to show for his involvement, the time for retirement came Sandy's way and his role was taken up by John Picton-Warlow who, until then had been the legal counsel for the two groups and he stood in until a more permanent joint secretary could be found.

Ultimately, the former president of the Tractor and Machinery Association and prominent John Deere figure, John Henchy, was able to take up the position in 2007 on his retirement from the company and it is he who holds tenure to this day.

During John's time in service to the combined groups, he and the two presidents (Kevin Jones FMDA and Alan Fisher, WARM) arrived at the view that their two organisations, which had now worked so cooperatively for a good many years, would benefit from formally combining their separate groups into one representative organisation.

The proposal was approved in principle by combined members at the joint AGM in 2011 whereby during the ensuing year the two constitutions were to be merged into one with a new name for the organisation and an appropriate logo to be devised and presented for approval at the following year's AGM.

Thus, at the 2012 AGM the formal motions were put and overwhelmingly approved by the members to establish the Farm Machinery & Industry Association of WA (Inc.) or FMIA in its abbreviated form.

Alan Fisher was elected to continue as its new president and the closely forged working relationship between he and executive officer John Henchy, aided by the convenience of both being domiciled in Perth, has enabled the new group to rapidly establish its relevance to the agricultural sector alongside the other representative groups serving the industry.

In yet another progressive move, the FMIA (via the executive officer) was in 2013, elected to a board position with the Tractor and Machinery Association (T.M.A.) based in Melbourne as the WA representative body on matters requiring a national position to be taken.

This further secures the role and voice for the all-important inputs sector at State and Federal level and culminates many years of evolution in representation of regional business.

The synergy of manufacturing

Inaugural Farm Machinery & Industry Association (FMIA) president Alan Fisher has had a long time involvement with the FMDA.

And he has played a pivotal role in the synergy between WA manufacturers and machinery dealers.

He also was involved in pioneering of no-till broadacre farming.

It is little publicised that before the Darkan farming brothers Ray and David Harrington promoted a system called no-till in the late 1980s, which followed the popular one pass direct drill system of crop establishment, Alan and fellow enthusiasts at a Perth-based foundry and engineering group had been deeply involved in providing the critical tool for the success of no-till -- a hard-wearing knife blade.

Alan has been involved with the farm mechanisation industry for more than 30 years and also was heavily involved in the partnership of WA manufacturers with machinery dealers which evolved into the present FMIA.

With a background in chemistry and metallurgy applied to industrial uses, he and a small team together with expertise from in-house metallurgist Kim Vance, developed the concept of a hard-wearing cast point for application at that time to conventional tillage practices.

It was this expertise that was later applied to designing both a knife and inverted-T blade, which played a critical part in enabling the adoption of no-till within broadacre farming crop establishment. In the late 1960s, Alan spent time in Sydney as a trainee industrial chemist, which included studying a metallurgy course and, after several roles in Victoria, WA and South Africa, on his return to WA in 1976, he was appointed sales engineer with Sandvik Australia.



Alan Fisher and his company's flagship Primary Precision Seeder.

During this time his work focused on applications mostly in the Goldfields, the Kwinana industrial area and the North West Shelf Gas Project.

Six years later, in 1982, the managing director of Fabcast Foundry & Engineering who, in a former capacity, had been a client of Alan's, invited Alan to join his company to manage the marketing and sales aspects of the Bayswater foundry and engineering works.

The move maintained Alan's involvement in chromium/nickel alloy applications but moved away from corrosion-resistance and into wear-resistance.

The strongest emphasis was on agricultural products, particularly the legendary Fabcast point and the company's team experimented with various cast shapes to improve the strength of the point and cutting efficiency, while exploiting the alloy's amazing wear-resistance, making shapes that generally emulated the press-formed shapes of the time.

Overcoming the limitations of the press-forming process, the casting was able to use designs which allowed wear-resistant metal to be shaped around the bolt head and thus protect it from wear as well as parallel wing tips to maintain cutting width during the wear-life of the point.

A continuous process of design improvement ensued which progressively added further advantages over the traditional press-formed steel points and market demand began to grow.

The points obviously became popular because they increased the life of the point by a factor between five and 10.

That pleased farmers because it dramatically reduced labour requirements involved in frequent changes of worn points and the cast versions better maintained weed kill, giving farmers the double bonus of seeding faster and improving the yield potential of crops with less weed competition.

During this timer, Alan undertook a marketing and management course in agribusiness with the Australian Institute of Management.

This was followed by his election to vice president of the Agricultural Manufacturers Association (later to evolve into the Western Australian Regional Manufacturers Inc. or WARM), which represented the many facets of the industry.

In October 1985 an opportunity for a management buy-out of the Fabcast agricultural products division arose and Alan joined with three fellow middle managers from Fabcast – Ray Moyle, Les Hunter and James True -- to acquire the operation and then establish the present company, Primary Sales Australia.

Equipped with the evolving application of Fabcast's alloy to the tillage points industry, Primary Sales worked for a time with the Harrington brothers as they developed no-till sowing.

Despite the phenomenally improved wear-resistance of this alloy over traditional steel versions, the trial work by the Harrington brothers was able to show that the relatively small amount of alloy used in a narrow point was still not able to provide uninterrupted sowing over the program so Primary Sales developed the seemingly impossible task of bonding tungsten carbide to the wearing faces of points cast from the almost non-compatible NiHard alloy -- a feat the tungsten carbide manufacturers had previously said was not possible due to the hardness and therefore low thermal ductility of the NiHard parent metal and the low coefficient of expansion and contraction of the tungsten carbide.

It was the start of what would become a revolution that swept Australia during the ensuing decade – and provided a boost for the nation’s tillage and seeding manufacturers, as well as setting the lead for a number of competitors to follow. It could be argued that without development work to enable tungsten carbide bonding to these newly-designed narrow points, the rapid take-up of no-till crop in broadacre farming would not have occurred so quickly in bringing forward the many benefits of this new farming system.

Primary Sales has continued its development work on a range of deep-working, narrow soil openers and from this platform it has developed a comprehensive selection of deep-banding fertiliser boots and height-adjustable, flexible sowing boots designed to provide selected seed depth placement depth while using deep-working narrow openers.

The company continued to follow a path of vertical integration by moving on to develop a range of narrow tines to replace the beefy C-shank tines now commonly used, in order to further limit moisture loss and soil disturbance and, ultimately it moved on to a position where it was able to offer the Primary Precision Seeding Bar, the original concept of which was designed and developed in the 1990s, by former FMDA and WARM president Terry Nichols, who then called it the Nichols Triple Action No-Till tine and tool bar.

This was successfully marketed for a time until Terry retired, with manufacturing and further development work being taken over by Primary Sales.

Since the beginning, Alan has served as a director with responsibility for marketing and sales (and more latterly with responsibility for business development) as well as in the role of company secretary, the duration of which now spans 27 years.

Primary Sales has been a foundation member of the Western Australian No-Till Farmers Association (WANTFA) and has worked closely with the industry to progress conservation farming.

Between 1995 and 1998, Alan was engaged in an extensive export market development drive encompassing the USA, Canada, UK/Europe and South Africa.

More recently major inroads into the east Africa market have been achieved and new potentials are being tapped into within the vast farming areas of the Eastern Bloc. The business now enjoys modern and extensive manufacturing, engineering and distribution facilities and has taken a leading role in bringing about beneficial and cost-efficient changes in farming systems applicable to semi-arid cropping conditions as found in Australia and many areas abroad. Alan was awarded the John Lynn Memorial Award in 1996 for his services to the industry.

Where does the law stand?



John Picton-Warlow (right) at the association's annual general meeting in 2006 handing over the secretarial reins to Travis King, who served briefly with the FMDA before taking the role of editor at Farm Weekly. Current FMIA executive officer John Henchy replaced Travis.

A 15 year association with the FMDA and WARM provided former solicitor John Picton-Warlow with a great appreciation for the two bodies.

And he credits his predecessor in the role of secretary, Sandy Lewis, as the driving force in the success of both bodies.

But the appreciation was two-way as John played a pivotal role from 1991, in introducing the benefits of a legal mind to many issues involving members of both organisations.

He served as secretary from 2002-2006.

He quickly found plenty of support of members, for his views of public servants following the letter of the law, without any knowledge of agriculture or the farm mechanisation industry.

John believes it was this ignorance that caused numerous incidents, provoking stress and strain among members and the loss of money through legal costs.

As a solicitor for members, John was a willing sounding board and adviser and often acted on members' behalf in legal issues pertaining to copyright infringements of equipment invented by members or chasing up errant debtors, who would brazenly skip from one machinery dealer to another, buying equipment on finance with no intention of making any repayments.

At one stage John suggested a debtor list be publicised to raise awareness among members of likely rogues, or delinquents.

But it was never done because of the perceived likelihood of causing defamation.

John, however, held a firm belief that a person in debt appearing before a judge could hardly be held to be defamed.

The main issue in John's time centred on bureaucracy, particularly the bureaucrats involved with Occupational Health and Safety, as it was known then.

"I remember going to a meeting in Geraldton at one stage to talk with safety inspectors who declared sieves in headers unsafe," John recalled.

They regarded the fact that a person could injure oneself by placing a finger in one of the holes of the sieve while the header was operating and therefore cutting off the finger.

"So their solution was to make the holes smaller which would have rendered the sieves totally useless in separating grain and chaff.

"In another incident, a safety inspector fined one of our members for having unsafe equipment for sale in his yard.

"It turned out the machines were in a stage of manufacture and clearly not for sale.

"We of course pointed this out to the OH&S people but it wasn't until Farm Weekly ran a story about it that the prosecution process was stopped.

"It is indicative of the frightening powers that government departments have and wield with no understanding of how ridiculous some of the so-called safety legislation is to an industry with so many variants.

"The legislation has been written by people in the city who have never had anything to do with country life and who indulge in the absurdities of over-governing."

Another issue to raise the ire of members was Department of Transport regulations concerning trade pates and transporting equipment on designated roads throughout the Wheatbelt to comply with low overhanging power lines.

"Again we had to deal with the incomprehension of civil servants who had no idea how legislation impacted on the cost of doing business for our members," John said.

This led to John drafting a document for the sale and hiring of machinery when the Department of OH&S started to blame dealers and manufacturers for farm accidents involving machinery and silos and including equipment altered in design or added equipment to the original item.

"We deemed the farmer to be the manufacturer if he changed anything and that exonerated our members from any legal liability surrounding accidents, involving the equipment," John said.

When Sandy Lewis retired in 2002, John stepped into a simmering environment involving relationships between the FMDA and WARM and the Motor Traders Association (MTA).

"There had been discussion before I became secretary that when Sandy retired, the secretariat could be taken over by the MTA," John said.

"I had never thought it was a good idea from my experiences in the way the MTA operated but I wasn't part of the discussions then.

"Eventually it was decided to replace Sandy and I applied for the position.

"In hindsight, the move not to join the MTA was a good one and I credit Sandy for the way members conducted themselves in the FMDA and WARM.

"There was a certain camaraderie that could never have been achieved by joining the MTA.

"Machinery dealers were different to car dealers and even though they were in fierce competition to one another, there still existed good friendship and communication between dealers.

"On many occasions it would lead to one dealer helping out another and I believe Sandy achieved that right from the start of the formation of the FMDA.

"It spread when WARM joined the association and reflected a substantial ethical response from dealers, as businessmen, constantly involved in machinery deals involving hundreds of thousands of dollars."

With an eye to the future

Long-serving FMDA secretary Sandy Lewis is well credentialed to speak on the politics of agriculture and the future of the industry.

Whether people like it or not, politics pervades all aspects of the farm mechanisation industry.

"I really worry about the industry with the present crop of polities," Sandy said.

"If you analyse a community with a machinery dealership, you have the basis of structure with employment for local people to sustain a community.

But you need more than a dealership and politicians aren't thinking through a big picture to keep people on the land.

"They are closing up shires, strangling local government then adding more imposts with shires carrying on-costs of projects funded from Royalties for Regions.

"When we first started dealerships throughout Australia, there were more than 3000 individual businesses in 1960.

"Today that number is under 300.

"What we have seen is the local dealer, the basis of local business, being cut out of the rural scene and you get this ripple effect where you lose quality people, which impacts on the shires' ability to maintain a sustainable community.

"I see the same challenges facing the dealers of the future as those faced by dealers in past years.

"Efficiency in management is a priority, which is why we tried so hard to continue the Cost of Doing Business Survey.

"The other aspect is basic good people skills."

But dealers with long memories will tell you that at the end of the day, the governments still have to lift their collective game to ensure people stay on the land."

Looking into the crystal ball

The thoughts of FMI&A executive officer John Henchy.

In little more than three generations, the farm machinery industry has made enormous strides and there is no reason to believe that the future will not move as fast or at an even greater rate of change.

Way back, the industry comprised manufacturers and agents, where basically the agent gave the manufacturers the name of the prospect and they did the rest, even, in some cases, taking the trade-in and the agent was given a commission to look after the product, once sold, with service and parts.

As time moved on some agents became dealers, taking full responsibility for selling the product and handling the trade, if there was one.

Now 50 years later some dealer groups are larger than the company they represent, certainly in the number of people they employ, and that trend, among some manufacturers, seems likely to continue.

Thirty years ago there were about 3000 dealers in Australia but now, in 2013, there are around 600. So, as with the primary producers they support, numbers have reduced but at a greater rate.

Over time machinery has become bigger and is much more efficient and more reliable so the need for a dealer in every country town is no longer required.

Dealers are managed professionally with good highly qualified staff and from a service perspective if a machine is required to be bought in for a major repair it is put on a truck, not repaired in the paddock with a tree as a gantry.

Farm mechanisation has improved primary production immensely and if it had not been for these technical advances, agriculture would not be nearly as efficient as it is today.

In the next half century it will be even more productive, with autonomous (driverless) vehicles and remote management control through telematics.

But if the product will be so advanced, what about the dealer. How will he or she operate in the future?

If trends continue it is clear that dealers will be responsible for a lot bigger area.

Even today some cover a third of WA but some can envisage one dealer handling the whole State for his or her particular manufacturer.

In fact some will be called classified as distributors and they will work directly with the manufacturers wherever they are, the US, Europe, Asia or South America.

Why would a manufacturer want the cost of a branch, in Australia, with all the associated costs?

Why would they need field people if the same support could be given via the internet and with direct contact with the manufacturer?

In the days of agents, the manufacturer or distributor used to have service people running around doing the work -- they would strip down the machines repair them and move on to the next town.

Now technology allows the machine to self-report a problem using telematics and the chances are that the part won't be repaired but exchanged for a new or re-manufactured component.

In the future, products will be even more componentised and even quicker to keep going with fewer people required.

In some instances there will be a replacement machine made available to help maintain the productivity. Most other businesses require optimum efficiency and improved productivity, so why not agriculture.

In the future, no machines will be built unless it has a customer name against it and when it is ready it will be shipped to Australia and then from the wharf to the farm.

Design and manufacturing will be such that pre-delivered will not be needed to be done by the distributor and the machine will be put straight into work.

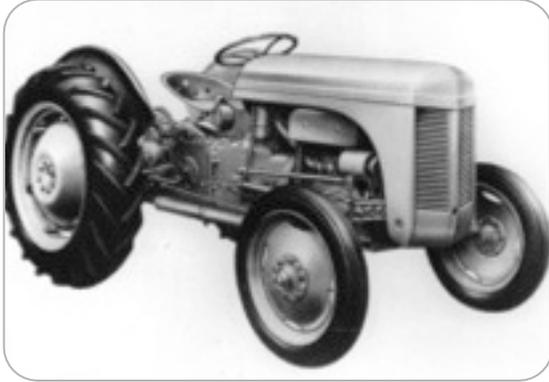
Any problems will be handled telematically -- remember there won't be an operator to make the adjustments.

The future for agriculture looks bright but it will need to change to cater for the high demands placed on food production.

Manufacturers and dealer/distributors in the farm mechanisation industry will have to change up a few gears to keep pace.

What we will see in the next century will be unrecognisable to the way we know it today.

A pictorial pathway from the past



The legendary Ferguson TE20. Nearly 360,000 were built between 1946 and 1953. Harry Ferguson once drove one onto the ballroom at Claridges Hotel in London.



A John Shearer horse-drawn ground-drive header, circa 1936.



The first air seeder manufactured in WA, the Agtech, designed by Darryl Symonds and Bill Malland, who later formed Fusion Engineers and made his own.



The famous Phillips Acremaster articulated 4WD tractor, made in Merredin by Laurie Phillips from 1983. In 1984, the company was sold to Don Zanetic, who built the Acremaster for International Harvester for a short period. Laurie continued his own line of tractor manufacturing under the brand name Phoenix until the late 1980s.



A jumbled collection of Chamberlain tractors pictured in the aftermath of a WA flood. Details are unknown.



LEFT: Broadacre farming took off in the 1980s, reflected by this John Shearer wideline combine seeder which was built up to unheard of widths in those days of 53 feet, to accommodate 160 seeding rows on 3.5 inches spacings.

RIGHT: Another original WA invention was the Computorpray, designed by Bill Hughes in 1968. It was distributed through Wesfarmers and quickly became an icon in the spraying world. Its simplicity and accuracy saw it sell throughout Australia with exports to the United States, Canada, England, South Africa and Libva.

FMDA PRESIDENTS

1977-1978 John Lynn
1979-1980 Terry Nichols
1981-1982 Ian Bolto
1983-1984 John Jolly
1985-1986 Greg Humphries
1987-1988 Terry Nichols
1989-1990 Ian Bolto
1991-1992 Ian Bolto
1993-1994 Richard Selwood
1995-1996 Richard Selwood
1996-1997 Richard Selwood
1998-1999 Greg Humphries
2000-2001 Greg Humphries
2002-2004 Bill Boekeman
2006-2008 Geoff Perkins
2009-2011 Kevin Jones

LIFE MEMBERS

2011 Greg Humphries
2012 Bill Boekeman

JOHN LYNN

MEMORIAL AWARD

1982 Roy Holtfreter
1987 Harley Pederick
1995 Brenton Aughey
1996 Bill Boekeman and Alan Fisher
2007 John Henchy
2009 Mick Laycock and John Williamson
2010 Glen Stanley

FMIA PRESIDENT

2012-2013 Alan Fisher

WA Regional Manufacturers Association (WARM) Presidents

Terry Nichols
Peter Nunn
Sandro Agrizzi
Neil Norrish
Alan Fisher

