

Obituary for Associate Professor Jim Kollmorgen

The erstwhile University of Melbourne's Faculty of Agriculture, Forestry and Horticulture, Institute of Land and Food Resources and Joint Centre for Crop Improvement note with sadness the passing of Associate Professor Jim Kollmorgen.

Jim, as he was known with the University, was a valued member of the Faculty of Agriculture, Forestry, and Horticulture and its institutes. As a plant pathologist with the Victorian Department of Agriculture, Jim brought to the University - through the Joint Centre of the two organisations - a wealth of expertise and contacts that significantly enhanced the University's profile in dryland cropping research. His Horsham base enabled seamless collaboration with the nearby Longerenong College, which was integrated with the University at the time. Professor Lindsay Falvey, Dean during the 1990s noted that "Jim encouraged a level of research activity that had not previously existed in this area, contributing to a vibrant and flourishing Faculty. In recognition of his contributions, Jim was awarded the title of Professor in the late 1990s."

Jim's professional legacy is perhaps best exemplified by his role as Director of the Joint Centre for Crop Improvement where he fostered a culture of hands-on research and collaboration between academia and industry, training many of today's leaders in the grains industry. The Centre brought together scientists, postgraduate students, and international visiting researchers, facilitating groundbreaking studies in dryland cropping and related areas. It was an era when the Faculty established joint relationships with various state government facilities including Horsham, Hamilton, Tatura, Kyabram and Ellinbank. As Professor Adrian Egan observed, "Jim was one of the Faculty's staunchest allies as we set out to establish formal relationships with researchers at each of those government research facilities."

Professor David Connor, Chairman of the JCCI Board, reflected on Jim's leadership, noting that he was "instrumental in ensuring the success of the JCCI. His dedication to mentoring graduate students and building bridges between the University and Agriculture Victoria was extraordinary." Projects like the ACIAR-funded "Improving the Productivity of Rice-Wheat Systems in Bangladesh" stand as a testament to Jim's ability to lead impactful research initiatives.

Professor Tim Reeves, a close colleague, described Jim as being "ahead of his time" and praised his efforts in promoting collaboration and innovation in agricultural science. Jim's arrival back after some post-graduate work at Max Planck Institute in Germany laid the foundation for "his establishment of the JCCI and his contributions to molecular biology within the Department of Agriculture were invaluable."

Beyond his professional achievements, Jim had a passion for Wiltshire Horn sheep, a breed known for its high fecundity and natural shedding of fleece. Colleague Professor Brian Leury fondly recalled their informal chats about sheep production: "Jim's

enthusiasm for his sheep was infectious, and he generously shared data and photos that I often used in my lectures."



Annual Meeting of JCCI. From left, Professor David Connor (Chairman of Board), Dr. Tony Fischer (Invited Speaker from CSIRO, Canberra), Professor Lindsay Falvey (Dean of Faculty) and A/Prof Jim Kollmorgen (Director of JCCI). [courtesy of D. Connor]

Professor Robert White, Acting Dean in the early 1990s, recalled the establishment of the JCCI with Jim as its inaugural Director and the immediate fillip it provided for graduate student supervision and research. In fact, as Professor Roger Cousens commented, "Jim was a real enthusiast for the centre" causing the number of postgraduate students to "rise to 15 or more at its zenith" according to Professor Snow Barlow who noted Jim's critical role becoming evident after Jim's retirement.

After retiring, Jim remained active in his personal and professional life, running a bed-and-breakfast in Metung while maintaining ties with former colleagues and students. Professor Paul Taylor, whom Jim recruited to the University in 1995, fondly remembers his last meeting with Jim in 2022. "We reminisced about the JCCI and the careers of the graduates we worked with. Without Jim's support, I would not have developed my career as I did." Following the JCCI's primary goal to engage graduate students jointly supervised by University and AgVic staff on industry-focused research projects, "Jim ran an effective program for about 15 years" that fed into the creation of the AgriBio initiative of Agriculture Victoria, the state government's operational name for its contributions to agricultural research.

Jim's leadership was not confined to his directorial roles; he was a key figure in establishing formal partnerships between the University of Melbourne, the Victorian Department of Agriculture, and industry bodies. His contributions were instrumental in boosting the University's research profile, particularly in dryland cropping. One graduate researcher from the heyday of JCCI under Jim's leadership was James Hunt who went on to develop his career through LaTrobe University and ultimately rose to become the Professor of Agronomy at the University of Melbourne in but one of the many indicators of Jim's lasting legacy.

Jim's family, friends, and colleagues will remember him not only for his remarkable professional legacy but also for his kindness, warmth, and devotion to those around him. His influence lives on in the many students he mentored, the research he championed, and the collaborative spirit he fostered within the agricultural community.

Jim is survived by his children Prudence, Jessica, Andrew, and Hannah; his grandchildren Bethany, Ella, William, Nieve, Parke, Rafe, Lila, Toby, Philippa, and Roland; and his brother Ray. We, his colleagues from those productive years, join together in offering our condolences to his family. Jim's impact on agriculture, education and research, and the lives of those he touched will never be forgotten.

**Prepared by: The Society of Old Agriculture Fellows, University of Melbourne
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