



# Vale Don Hutton

1946–2023

It is with profound sadness that we report on the passing of the much-loved and highly respected Don Hutton and acknowledge his significant contribution to the Australian Strawberry Industry and science.

Don began his career in 1968, as a cadet with the then Queensland's Department of Primary Industries (DPI), now Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF). He was based initially in Kingaroy, QLD for 5 years, then was transferred to the Brisbane facility at Indooroopilly where he worked on managing barley diseases and fungicide efficacy field studies. In December 1981 he came to Nambour and worked on several horticultural crops, mainly strawberry, custard apple and passionfruit, at the DAF Maroochy Research Facility. After 43 years in the Department, Don retired in 2011.

For almost three decades, Don led a long and distinguished career in strawberry research. Don's work on DAF's several strawberry disease management projects contributed enormously to the local Queensland and the national industry, with outcomes that benefited both runner nursery and fruit production sectors.

Don was also a significant figure with strawberry growers particularly during the early years and the growth of the local industry in south-east Queensland. In the 90's, Colletotrichum crown rot had caused severe devastation for many years. Queensland growers at the time credited Don with saving the local industry, not just through his diagnostics and research, but also his compassion and strong constant presence were critical. Then, the industry was just beginning and consisted of family-based growers who only grew small numbers of plants. Don found control measures and instigated change in standards and protocols to support both nursery and fruit production that are still used to this day. Don's work helped the industry grow to where it is today.

From a research perspective, Don identified new fungicide chemistries against *Podosphaera aphanis*, previously *Sphaerotheca macularis*, the pathogen that causes powdery mildew disease. Even though he regularly warned growers 'there is nothing like methyl bromide', Don identified a range of alternatives to this ozone-depleting fumigant for strawberry growers that helped with not just managing disease, but also weeds.

He first identified the charcoal rot (caused by *Macrophomina phaseolina*) epidemic of strawberry in Australia and was the

first in the world to report on the role of infected crowns as inoculum sources for the disease. Don was involved in the diagnostics and research on strawberry lethal yellows and subsequently found the cause of the disease and developed management strategies for the nursery and fruit production. In collaboration with other researchers, he helped in the initial identification and management of the foliar nematode *Aphelenchoides fragariae* and the quarantine pathogen angular leaf spot (caused by *Xanthomonas fragariae*).

Don was a founding member of the 'Better Berries' program that integrated extension and research in strawberry for first time. Don was the main contact for the strawberry industry and stakeholders locally and nationally. He consistently provided input towards disease management, disease outbreaks, diagnostics, fungicide options, and many other disease-related topics.

As one of his last professional achievements, Don wrote a chapter on strawberry diseases in Australia, which remains the most up-to-date, relevant and comprehensive treatise.

Don's passion and dedication to his discipline of plant pathology, his thoroughness, his attention to detail, and duty to service growers within the strawberry industry were second-to-none. His compassion was also reflected in his commitment to his family and community life outside of work. He was a caring and highly effective mentor to many young scientists, not just within the Department, but also pathologists and agronomists around Australia. Many scientists of today are standing on Don's mighty shoulders, and this will ensure his ongoing legacy for support on strawberry diseases for industry.

Don was a well-respected researcher and diagnostician, and highly regarded by his DAF colleagues, growers, crop agronomists and industry associates with whom he connected with.

To honour Don, DAF has named the pathology wing of the Maroochy Research Station the 'Hutton Laboratory'.

**Don will be remembered as a person with a big heart and his kindness and genuine nature will be sorely missed.**