

2014 AARES Distinguished Life Member

James Garrett Ryan



Jim Ryan's outstanding professional career in agricultural economics has included important contributions to research and to policy formulation, both in Australia and internationally. A consistent feature of his research work has been the integration of agricultural science and economic analysis, a focus that has required collaborative work with agronomists, geneticists and agricultural engineers, among others. He has been an institution builder, applying his multidisciplinary approach in Australia, in India and in Africa.

Jim studied under Keith Campbell and Bruce Davidson in the Agricultural Economics Department of the University of Sydney. After receiving his bachelor's degree in 1962 he joined the NSW Department of Agriculture, where he was assigned to Leeton, as one of the first regional economists of the Department, completing his master's degree as an external student, again under Campbell and Davidson. His master's thesis derived optimal farm plans for the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area, including optimal farm sizes, using parametric linear programming. This work required extensive collaboration with non-economist scientists for input-output information on present and prospective technologies for incorporation into the analysis, a theme of much of Jim's subsequent research methodology.

From 1968 to 1972 Jim was a PhD student at North Carolina State University, on leave from the NSW Department. His PhD thesis estimated a production function for potato production in Peru, drawing on technological information from a large cooperative program conducted at the University. It was adjudged the best Ph.D. dissertation from the Department of Economics of the University in 1971/72. After his return to Australia in 1972, Jim rejoined the NSW Department of Agriculture and continued his research, including the economics of farm size in wheat-sheep farms, comparing cross-sectional and time series approaches.

From 1974 to 1983 Jim was Leader of the Economics Program at the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), one of the largest of the 16 International Agricultural Centers of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research with headquarters in Hyderabad, India. During this time he traveled extensively in India, Africa, Europe, and North and South America, building a strong economics research team with an international reputation. Jim and his colleagues made important progress in the area of ex ante assessment of the economics of prospective agricultural technologies and on-farm evaluation of agricultural technologies. He returned to Australia in 1983 and became Deputy Director of the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) in Canberra. He initiated and managed ACIAR's programs in Africa and had responsibility for those in South East Asia and the South Pacific.

From 1991 to 1997 Jim was Director General of ICRISAT, which then had some 1300 staff in Hyderabad, plus seven locations in Africa involving another 600 and an annual budget exceeding \$30 million. He

led research on the economics of the staple food crops of the poorest people of Asia and Africa, including genetic enhancement research on these crops to increase their productivity and stability.

Since his return to Australia in late 1997 Jim has worked actively as an international agricultural R & D consultant, completing numerous influential commissioned reports for international institutions, along with his own continuing research.