

THE DAVID GRAYS STORY

An excerpt taken from an article penned by David J Gray, October 2021

David Gray and Company commenced business in Western Australia as a stock food manufacturer and distributor.

David Douglas Gray, who had had prior industry experience working with Dalgety's and in other industries opened the doors in 1939. The company initially operated out of West Perth as this was close to the market gardeners in the early days. As we were involved in the agriculture sector it became obvious that we needed to expand our product range.

This was the era when we saw the arrival of DDT and the phenoxy herbicides. David Gray & Company became involved in the formulation and distribution of both of these products, and it is interesting to look back at the number of companies which were approved by Amchem Products Inc. of the USA who were the holders of the Australian patent for the phenoxy products.

Of the nine companies approved as suppliers which included ICI ANZ, Lanes Ltd, Shell Chemical and DHA Rural DAVID GRAYS is the only one still trading in its own right today. The advent of DDT meant that David Gray and Co. became involved in the formulation of a range of products for both the horticulture and broadacre sectors. In addition, the company broadened its base into the consumer market, using DDT as a fly spray and garden dust active ingredient and marketed these products throughout Western Australia and to a limited degree South Australia. These products saw the start of a range of gardening products including fertilisers primarily marketed through the local supermarkets in WA. It also involved the company becoming a participant in aerosol production, which led to the development of our insect repellent 'Scram' and then the development of our 'Outdoor Fogger' aerosol product which are still important products for the company today.

The company also diversified into aerial agriculture with a fleet of Tiger Moths and into industrial hygiene products for the Pest Control industry, particularly as the organochlorines such as dieldrin and aldrin were being developed for these markets.

My involvement with the company commenced in 1968, initially in purchasing and accounting, however having an oversight on the operations of the company and becoming involved in production. It was at this time that the company moved to its current premises in O'Connor. There was at this stage significant development in the consumer product range, largely through the availability of the synthetic pyrethroids, and because of the access to the retail consumer market provided by David Grays a number of suppliers worked with us to have their product range marketed by David Grays into the consumer market.

Both the aerial agriculture division and the industrial hygiene application division were sold in order that the company could concentrate on manufacturing and distribution. Due to the company's distribution of herbicides and industrial hygiene products into the local government sector, we also became distributors of the SULO mobile garbage bin business for Western Australia as initially all the local councils were responsible for the implementation of the mobile garbage bin system. This remains an important division of the company today.



Company founder David Douglass Gray, a keen aviator and Western Australian industrialist



One of the many company de Havilland Tiger Moth aircraft utilised for carrying out the company crop dusting service operations.

Having expanded the business by purchasing the O'Connor site that was next door to our original site, we were able to expand our manufacturing facilities with the addition of flowable mills and further re-packaging facilities. This in turn has led to the company becoming involved in toll manufacturing for a number of major agricultural companies. At the same time we opened our 'Trade Centre' primarily for the supply to the professional pest control and turf care sectors. In addition, there was significant rationalisation within both the supermarket and hardware space with these sectors changing from local West Australian retailers to becoming nationally focused supermarket and hardware marketing organisations.

At the same time product registrations moved from being a state-controlled process to one of national registration through the NRA that became the APVMA. Because of these changes, we were able to move our marketing to a national basis which allowed us to grow significantly in the consumer products sector.

In 2005, due to the sale of Robert Linton and Co. to the then Wesfarmers Ltd, David Gray & Co. was offered the opportunity to become the I.H.D distributor in Western Australia. While initially we found it difficult to obtain the acceptance in the marketplace that Robert Linton & Co. had experienced, with the assistance of Mal Roach we initially discussed with John Cross an opportunity to expand our business and he in turn introduced us to Warren Stirrat who became the general manager of our then I.H.D. division, now trading as David Grays Aglink. Under their stewardship the business has today expanded to over 50 West Australian independent rural outlets which commands around 25% of the agricultural chemical distribution in Western Australia, using the marketing concept of 'locals supporting locals'.

The business today represents all major agricultural and veterinary chemical suppliers along with all of the seed companies involved in horticulture and broadacre crops. We also developed a generic range of products under our own label that were necessary to compete with alternative generics. To ensure our generics were competitive, until the advent of COVID, I attended the two major agricultural chemical exhibitions in Shanghai each year which were eye-openers in themselves and developed excellent relationships with a number of suppliers. In addition, we created the AgroAdvantage brand that oversees a number of trial sites where we are able to work with our major suppliers to develop and broaden their product range.

I have always believed that one of the company's great strengths has been the flexibility provided to us as an independent business and not tied to any corporate culture. We have been able to move immediately to make change as may be required and that often has provided an advantage and point of differentiation in the marketplace and allowed us to take up opportunities without involving a great deal of bureaucracy.

As at July 1 2021, I took the opportunity to sell the company's interest in our Aglink division to Delta Agribusiness, as we could see that there were many synergies in working with them that would be of benefit to the company in the long term. It was obvious that as an independent company, Delta Agribusiness's culture was very similar and that the operations and staff would continue with little change apart from ownership. The company still trades as David Grays Aglink in Western Australia and has continued to grow following the takeover. The future in agriculture in Western Australia is strong, however it now has the strong resourcing that Delta Agribusiness can provide. They have also maintained the Aglink membership which I always believed would be of benefit as it had been to me since becoming a shareholder.

While consumer products and mobile garbage cart (wheelie bins) distribution is still very important to David Grays, I have always found that working in the agricultural chemical industry with the rural distributors and the outlets is a pleasure, primarily due to the fact that each retailer who needs to be competitive, does not endeavour to drive the price through the floor as they are far more conscious about other services offered and maintaining reliable supply when and as required.

David Grays pride themselves on servicing local West Australian business catering to all their Gardening, Agricultural, Pest Control, Turf Care & Wheelie Bin requirements, and look forward to continuing building on our relationships into the future.



Company founder David Douglass Gray and David John Gray
at 2 Rawlinson St, O'Connor



The early days in West Leederville, and area which is now the intersection of
Graham Farmer Freeway, Kwinana, Freeway and Mitchell Freeway.