

Obituary - Dr John Moll 1943- 2006

(By Barry Manicom – November 17, 2006)

Sadly, John Moll died after a three year battle with pancreatic cancer on the 8th October, 2006, aged 63. This was somewhat unexpected, as of late, a change in the chemotherapy had been markedly successful, and he was back to his usual rambunctious self, and threatening to win large sums of money from me at golf.

John joined the Citrus and Subtropical Research Institute in 1971, working under Ralph Schwarz and with Fanie van Vuuren as technician. Ralph soon left to join the FAO ending up in Brazil. John da Graça joined and this group was deeply involved in setting up the Citrus Improvement Program in South Africa in the mid 70's. At the time, this consisted of selecting the best producing, longest lived trees of the various commercial cultivars and establishing these as mother trees for the entire industry. CTV isolates from these and other trees were collected at the same time for evaluation.

Gerd Muller's work on mild strain protection and Luis Navarro et al.'s development of the shoot tip grafting technique were integrated to form the next stage of taking mother material through STG to clear out pathogens and preimmunising, after a visit by Chet Roistacher to teach the STG method. After much argument, MS12 and MS35 were chosen as mild strain protectors based on glasshouse data. This turned out to be a fortuitous decision as these isolates were very effective and are still in use. LMS6 which is now used for sweet orange was selected by John da Graça from a backyard tree at this time. A number of countries have copied the SA CIP so something must be useful.

His PhD was completed in 1974, the subject being 'Citrus greening disease' now known as Huanglongbing. This confirmed and extended on work of Joseph Bové's group, coming down firmly on the side of the organism being a Procaryote as opposed to a Mollicute, which only culminated a few years ago in it being assigned the designation 'Candidatus Liberibacter'.

John spent some months at Lake Alfred in 1981 (Timmer, Lee, Brlansky) commuting to Orlando (Garnsey) working on blight and CTV serology and then moved on to Bové's lab in Bordeaux, where at the time research was toward developing serological tests for greening. In 1985 it was the turn of the citrus virologists to visit South Africa and a highly fun International Tristeza Workshop was held – the expression 'hairy bum' comes to mind though I have no idea what it means.

John left the Institute in 1987 for Crookes Brothers, a large agricultural company where he headed the citrus division, and dabbled in lesser crops such as apples, but citrus remained his first love and he chaired the citrus industry's Pathology Research Committee and was on the board of Citrus Research International. He remained with Crookes Bros until retiring due to the cancer.

Late in life, only last year, he married again, to 'Chooks' his companion of several years, a lady who actually enjoyed his huntin' and fishin' expeditions, and our sympathies lie with her.