JOHN HORACE (JACK) INGHAM, AO
10 June 1928 - 5 August 2003

J.G. FAIRBROTHER

Jack Ingham AO, the elder of the Ingham brothers whose inspired vision created a business empire based on chicken meat, died on the 5th August 2003, after a long illness. Combining an entrepreneurial skill with a down-to-earth manner, Jack Ingham left many admirers in both the poultry industry and the thoroughbred racing industry.

INGHAMS ENTERPRISES PTY LTD

Without any doubt, the two giants who dominated the chicken meat industry from the mid 1960s to the present day were the ‘Chicken Kings’, as Jack and Bob Ingham were known to the media. They inherited a 45 hectare property at Casula in western Sydney, stocked with 650 pigs and 30,000 birds producing a half-million chickens a year, after the sudden death of their father in 1953. They built this into the largest integrated poultry operation in Australia, spanning all States and New Zealand yet still remaining a private company.

In 1959, Inghams entered into a franchise agreement for New South Wales with AA Tegel Pty Ltd for the supply of breeding stock. This was consolidated in 1963 when they purchased a 50 percent share in the Tegel operation. Over the next two decades this was increased to encompass the hatcheries and franchises offered by Tegel, Australia-wide. Inghams Enterprises now supplies more than half of all day-old meat chickens produced in Australia. Its main success, however, came in processing and marketing.

After Jack visited the United States and Great Britain in 1960, he and Bob built Australia’s largest poultry abattoir at Hoxton Park, NSW. The hatchery was rapidly expanded and farming properties acquired as the meat and egg laying business grew. In these early years, a firm supplier/retailer bond was established with Woolworths and its Chairman, Sir Theo Kelly. This was to be the cornerstone of promoting frozen chickens, not only in New South Wales but in all other States where Woolworths had a strong retail presence. As the business expanded, a regular feed supply arrangement was established with Allied Feed Mills.

In June 1965, the partnership of Inghams Enterprises was formed into a proprietary company in Canberra. The initial shareholders were Jack and Bob Ingham, and they remained the holders of the entire ordinary share capital of the company. In 1966, they produced a 30-minute colour film called Chicken City based on their own operations, as a demonstration of the development that had taken place in the industry. This was premiered at the AMP Theatrette, Circular Quay, before a distinguished audience of government, industry, retail and commercial organisations. It was shortly after this that interstate expansion commenced. An offer was made to the Poultry Farmers’ Co-Operative Society Ltd in Queensland for the sale of its processing plant at Park Ridge. Subsequently, the brothers purchased a hatchery at Wynnum and its associated breeding farm at Cleveland.

Kentucky Fried Chicken (now KFC) commenced operating in Australia in 1968 and a long association with Inghams resulted. Bob Lapointe and then Hilton Coops helped expand the business through company and franchised stores. Over the years, the major fast food groups have also aligned themselves with the market leader.

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AMATIL, through its subsidiary Associated Products and Distribution Pty Ltd, was also vigorously buying food companies throughout Australia. Realising their vulnerability in Victoria, both Inghams and AMATIL bid strongly for the Golden Poultry Farming Industries organisation controlled by Max Nelson and Don Moy. They became joint owners in what was a 20-year partnership embracing the farming and processing operations of Windsor Poultry Services and Wy Wurry hatchery in South Australia, Glenila Poultry in Tasmania and finally in 1972, by a share re-arrangement, the Diamond Foods company in Western Australia. In each instance the Tegel franchise to grow and supply day-old meat chickens was retained. A year later, Inghams further consolidated its position in South Australia with the takeover of the Chickmaster and Peter Simon hatcheries, the Whiting and Chambers feed-mill at Mile End and the processing plants of Achilles at Bolivar and Murrayland Producers at Murray Bridge.

On 30 June 1978, Inghams acquired the Mountain View Distributors business from Allied Mills Industries Limited. It also acquired the SPB layer which allowed them to develop further the market for a commercial layer.

Just as in the earlier days of their development, when the brothers realised the importance of securing their source of supply of genetically superior breeding stock, so also did they appreciate that control over feed-milling and raw material costs was essential if they were to remain competitive. Two of the most modern feed-mills in Australia were constructed at Clyde on the Westernport Peninsula in Victoria (1979) and at Cardiff in NSW (1982). These, along with five other mills around Australia, turned wheat, oats, sorghum, soya and other materials into finished feed for the billions of birds the company reared and fed.

In July 1980, the company acquired Eurunderee Stud in NSW and later that year, Inghams consolidated its position in Victoria with the purchase of Cester Poultry and Pappas Poultry Pty Ltd. The same year a decision was made to establish smallgoods and further processing operations in both Queensland and New South Wales.

During the 1980s and 90s, a number of further acquisitions and facility upgrades took place. These included a Product Development Centre with further processed production capacity in New South Wales, a quarantine farm in Bungonia New South Wales, a new processing plant in South Australia and significant upgrading of processing facilities in Victoria and New Zealand. The Company builds Australia's largest and most sophisticated processing plant at Murrarie on the outskirts of Brisbane in 2001. The Group had relocated its Head Office to a multi-story office block in Liverpool in 1987.

INDUSTRY SERVICE

In 1973 the Ingham brothers won the WPSA Australian Poultry Award for service to the poultry industry, not simply for the success of their company, but also for their tireless involvement in industry matters. The Ingham brothers were both members of the New South Wales Breeders and Hatcherymen's Association from 1954 - 1970 and Jack was President from 1961 - 1963. Established in 1944, the B & H Association was the most significant industry association during this period. It effectively spawned the NSW Chicken Meat Council in 1964 and Jack was its representative on the Council. This Council was a prime mover in the establishment of the Australian Chicken Meat Federation in 1965.

The National Federation, due partly to its structure, ran into problems that it could not solve and a substantial oversupply situation was reached throughout the industry in the late 1960s. The ultimate outcome was the formation, in 1968, of the Australian Poultry Industries Association (APIA). This was an Association of the nine major integrated chicken meat companies with representation by the managing directors. Jack Ingham was the foundation
Chairman and he chaired APIA continuously until August 2003. His ability to reach a consensus on issues was legendary, showing his great interpersonal skills and perseverance.

During this period Jack worked tirelessly for the industry generally, becoming involved in numerous delegations to Federal and State Ministers, Convention attendance and involvement in industry seminars. On one such occasion, in October 1979 he gave the opening address at an APIA seminar related to meat inspection and microbiological testing. He gave away his love for his other passion when he said “I don’t know a lot about microbiological testing, but “microbiological” - what a great name for a race horse!”

The Inghams were strong supporters of poultry research from the earliest days. The poultry Husbandry Research Foundation of the University of Sydney, established in 1959 was a recipient of Ingham funding from day one, through the NSW B & H Association. Such funding has continued unabated and Inghams Enterprises is a governor of the Poultry Research Foundation. As well as establishing their own research programs - in processing, nutrition, avian health, genetics, product development and marketing, Jack and Bob were keen to support the establishment of the Australian Chicken Meat Research Council in 1969 and were prepared to support, financially and with senior staff, the formation of the Australian Poultry Co-operative Research Centre in 2002.

In 2003 Jack and Bob Ingham were both awarded the Order of Australia (AO) for, among other things, their service to the Australian poultry industry, thoroughbred racing and the community.

Jack’s family saw him as devoted, supportive and immensely generous. He and his brother Bob extended this generosity to others in many ways, contributing not with fanfare but with compassion and pride to many charities and causes to help those less fortunate than themselves. They established the Ingham Institute of Medical Research at Liverpool Hospital, an Orthopaedic Fellowship at the Children’s Hospital at Westmead and make annual contributions to many others.

At his funeral at St Andrew’s Anglican Cathedral on the 12th August 2003 his eldest son Walter said: “Jack was a person who loved to be around people, to be with them in person or talking to them. He could not get enough contact. He wanted every opportunity to embrace life and openly share his life with you. He was a rare and special person who had the gift of instantly connecting to you with warmth that most of us can only wonder at and admire.”

These words are echoed by all who knew him.