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Alex's enterprise

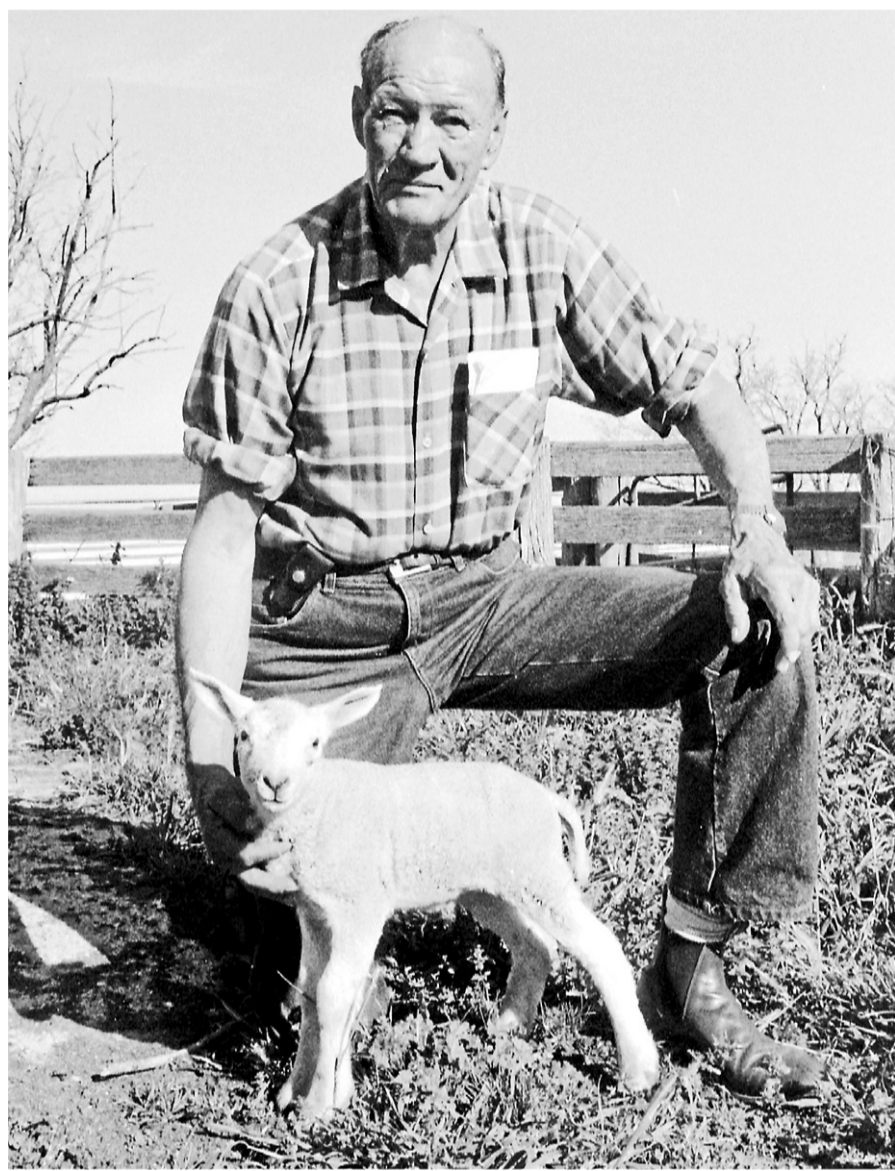
G OULBURN Produce Mitre 10 and CRT could be called the flagship of the Maas family enterprise started by Alex Maas and now involving his children and grandchildren as well as a dedicated team of staff.

It is over 30 years since Alex announced to his sons that he had purchased the PDS rural supply store in Craig St, a premise still owned and used

by the family as part of the Goulburn Produce business.

This Saturday the family is holding a special open day to launch the new look Mitre 10 store at their Sloane St premises.

The gates open at 8am with the main activities getting underway from 10 till 2pm.



ALWAYS INNOVATIVE: Alex Maas in 1993, with one of the Texel sheep he had raised from the original batch of embryos, imported from Holland and which he implanted into his Lancashire sheep with the aim of improving quality of the family's meat sheep flock. This was another innovation to enhance the farming enterprise's production rates. The Texel sheep are known for their high twinning rates and lean heavy muscle growth rate. The Maas meat sheep still contain the Texel bloodlines.



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Biscuits to agriculture

ALEX Maas was the first biscuit manufacturer to introduce cellophane packaging in Australia and was soon followed by the bigger companies, such as Arnotts.

He owned the Windmill Biscuit Company at Greenacre in Sydney, which he started after World War Two.

In 1942 he arrived in Sydney and was put in charge as a chef at the Netherlands-East Indies Catering Service.

When the Dutch crew shipped out in 1946, Alex Maas stayed behind, having married Gladys in 1943. Initially they started making the biscuits in their Belfield home.

The factory started in 1948 and built up to 110 employees. In those days biscuits were made by hand, using a canvas bag.

After buying Gilmour Station in 1963, the Maas family was hit by a devastating six year drought.

The Maas family have built up Gilmour Station to provide accommodation.

It's a long way from being a cook in the Dutch Merchant Navy to developing a highly

diversified farming and agribusiness empire in the Southern Tablelands.

But that's the achievement of the late Alex Maas, whose three sons now run Goulburn Produce and Rural Supplies and three mixed farming properties covering 3400 hectares.

Mr Maas senior, who died in 2002, was apparently a single minded, enterprising and somewhat eccentric individual, always looking for ways to improve on the present.

Youngest son, Bernard – who manages the stores at Goulburn and Braidwood with his brother, Martin, while a third brother, Lex, runs the farms – said their father's Windmill brand biscuits were the first to be wrapped in cellophane bags in Australia.

The idea was one Alex and Gladys had come up with to encourage people to purchase their product because with the austere times biscuits were considered a luxury.

Australia's iconic biscuit company, Arnotts, at that stage sold biscuits in tins.

In the late 1950s Mr Maas senior sold the biscuit business, buying a 160ha property at

Minto, south of Sydney near Campbelltown to grow lucerne and raise calves.

He realised the farm would not support four sons (the fourth and oldest is now in Queensland), so he bought Gilmour Station in 1963, Bernard Maas said.

The 1800ha Goulburn district property ran Gilmour Station cattle and sheep, at one stage it also had deer and a piggery.

Things changed suddenly, however, one day in 1983 when Mr Maas walked into the local PDS store in Goulburn to buy birdseed and learnt the agricultural supplies and dairy product company had been taken over and its Goulburn store was closing.

He went straight to Sydney to persuade the new management to sell him the local store, then returned home to announce to his sons they were to become produce merchants.

Trading was quiet at first because of the 1983 drought, but once the season broke farmers opened their wallets again and spent up on things such as fencing.