

# A life cultivated by horticulture

**Noel Jeffrey Sims**

Horticulturist

**Born:** August 7, 1935; Adelaide

**Died:** October 9, 2006; Shanshan County, China

**N**OEL Sims was widely recognised throughout his career as a horticulturist of great vision and energy who was responsible for the development of the large-scale stone-fruit and almond plantation Simarloo at Lyrup, near Loxton.

The son of Rupert and Olive Sims, he was educated at Goodwood Primary and Adelaide Boys High schools.

He did an apprenticeship as a fitter and turner and then became a refrigeration mechanic with White Engineering.

He married Margaret Perry in 1958, and the couple travelled to New Jersey, U.S., where Noel worked for Seabrook Farms, which was then the world's largest vegetable processor.

On his return to Australia in 1960, Noel joined his father and uncles in the family business, Robern, where he assisted with the construction and operation of the Loxton fruit-processing plant.

In 1968, Noel was approached by Paul Mariani II to join his Mariani Dried Fruit Company in San Jose, California.

Noel returned to Australia with his family in 1970 and was entrusted with the infrastructure development of Simarloo, the new Mariani enterprise at Lyrup, which was at that time the largest horticultural development in the southern hemisphere.



He became general manager and took the company to great heights, fully integrating production processing, packing and marketing. Following changes in the ownership of the company, Noel eventually purchased Simarloo. He was regarded as a disciplined, committed and skilled manager, who worked enthusiastically, tirelessly and passionately to build and consolidate the operation of the company.

He constantly looked for new challenges. In 1977, he purchased a lemon property in Melbourne which became the Virgin Hills Farm and in 2001 he established what is now known as the Virgin Hills processing

plant near Berri, where he again utilised the skills learned in his days with Robern in the processing of glace fruit.

Among his many achievements was the instigation of the dual-hemisphere marketing program of sugar plums. This saw him return to California annually for 23 years to pack and market their seasonal production to complement the Simarloo crop.

Noel's commitment to the almond industry was both far-reaching and close to his heart. He was one of the longest-standing directors of the Almondco board and contributed to a number of horticultural industry boards and committees.

He was widely regarded as a man of boundless energy and drive.

International business opportunities were always pursued, with long-term trading relationships built around the world.

China was a market visited for 20 years. Noel built up an in-depth knowledge of this vast country and its capabilities, and was highly regarded throughout many regions.

His extensive evaluation was beginning to bear fruit with the commencement of many horticultural-based projects.

He was larger than life – a man with an enormous spirit characterised by honesty, integrity, discipline and commitment.

He was also a generous man who quietly helped many.

Noel died following injuries received in a car accident in Shanshan County, Xinjiang Province in western China.

He is survived by his wife, Margaret, his children, Anita and Leroy, and his four grandchildren.