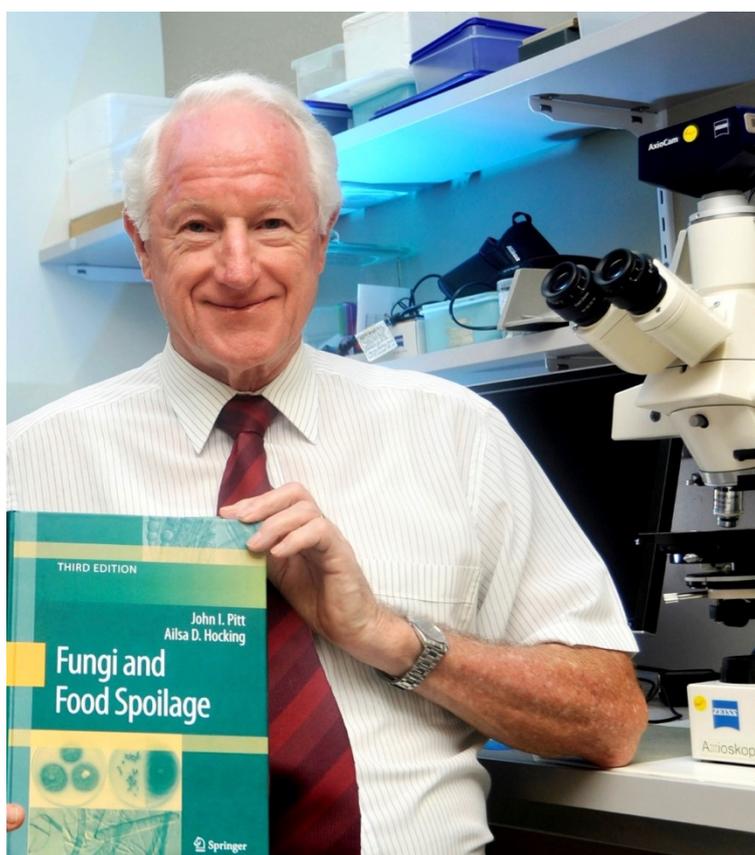


## John Ingram Pitt 1937-2022

With deep sadness we report the passing of Dr John Pitt on 23 March 2022, after a long and courageous battle against lymphoma.

On 1st March, 1954, just before his 17th birthday, John Pitt started his first job, joining CSIRO Division of Food Preservation as a Technical Assistant Grade 1 (Junior). He moved up through all research grades, reaching Chief Research Scientist in 1992. He was proud of the fact that he was the only CSIRO employee to have ever achieved the feat of moving up from TA to CRS. John undertook a part-time degree in Food Technology at the University of New South Wales, then continued with an MSc qualifying course at UNSW, and then a part time MSc, studying "Microbiological Problems in Prune Preservation". In these early



years he worked on the preservation of dried fruit, which led into his life-long interest in mycological aspects of food spoilage. A full time PhD at University of California, Davis, studying yeast taxonomy, was followed by a postdoctoral year at the USDA Northern Regional Research Center, Peoria, Illinois, where he learnt *Penicillium* taxonomy. These years set up the two main streams to John's science: John the taxonomist and John the food mycologist.

John the food mycologist sought to understand the relationships between fungi and food spoilage and the production of mycotoxins in the food supply, working on improving the methods and media used to isolate fungi from foods. He provided practical help and advice on mycological problems to the Australian food industry, from paddock to plate. He undertook projects with the Australian peanut industry, investigating ways to prevent the formation of aflatoxin in peanuts by using biocontrol strains of *Aspergillus* that could not produce aflatoxin. He worked with the Australian wheat industry on the quality of export wheat. He collaborated on projects in the Riverina region to understand and ameliorate the threat of ochratoxin contamination

of Australian wine and sultanas. In South East Asia, he worked on ACIAR funded projects on dried fish, and a wide range durable commodities, to assess quality and potential mycotoxin problems.

John was there for the Australia food processing industry, providing advice and assistance in managing spoilage problems cause by preservative resistant yeasts, heat resistant moulds, xerophilic fungi, *Penicillium* and *Aspergillus* in products as diverse as beverages, fruit purees, syrups, confectionery, cakes, bread, flour, tomato paste. For all these projects, and many others, John employed and trained young graduate scientists, and PhD students, many of whom went on to have very successful careers elsewhere in microbiology, food science and food mycology in Australia and abroad.

John built up a significant network of colleagues within Australia and overseas and was highly respected. His expertise in mycotoxins and foodborne fungi resulted in invitations to speak at conferences, giving many keynote and plenary addresses. He was valued for his productive contributions on many high-level international committees and working parties, including ICMSF, ICFM, WHO and FAO. In 2003, John Pitt was awarded the Centenary Medal, Commonwealth of Australia, for "Services to Food Science and Technology"

John was always very generous with his knowledge and loved teaching. With his North and South American colleagues, he organised and taught many workshops on *Penicillium* and *Aspergillus* identification, and food mycology methods and identification of foodborne fungi. This enthusiasm to pass on knowledge has been the driving force behind the forthcoming 4<sup>th</sup> edition of "Fungi and Food Spoilage", due out later this year and it is sad that he will not see the finished product.

On a personal level, John was our colleague, mentor and friend, always available to provide advice and encouragement. We shared many fine meals and glasses of good Australian wine and enjoyed countless hours of conversation with him. He provided invaluable support to our careers and to the careers of so many others. He was also a demon on the dance floor and a master behind the barbeque. He will be greatly missed.

*Obituary by Ailsa Hocking, Dee Carter and Wieland Meyer*