
Obituary

Ir Douwe Ehlhardt

1936 – 2016



With great sadness we have lost a good friend and scientist. On February 1, 2016 Ir Douwe Arnold Ehlhardt passed away in a hospital in Amsterdam at the age of almost 80 years. Douwe, born in Leeuwarden on February 18, 1936 graduated at Wageningen University in 1961. After completing his military service, he started in 1963 his professional career at the Cooperative Poultry Breeder Institute (CPI) in Nuland. Here Douwe became secretary of the scientific breeding committee to advice members of the layer breeder's cooperative on genetic selection issues.

In 1971 Douwe became senior scientist at the Spelderholt Centre for Poultry Research in Beekbergen with a special focus on turkey research.

Following the fast increase in broiler meat consumption during the sixties it was believed that turkey meat consumption would follow the same trend. This made Douwe to decide to visit Prof Karl Nestor in Wooster (Ohio). In 1972 he went to the USA and worked together with Prof Nestor at his institute to improve his knowledge on breeding, hatching, feeding, housing and disease control of turkeys.

Back in The Netherlands, Douwe became secretary of the Dutch Branch of WPSA, which position he held until 1977. In that year he went for two and a half years with his family to Naivasha in Kenya where he, on behalf of the Dutch Government, built an applied poultry research station. After returning to The Netherlands Douwe was asked to become secretary of the European Federation of WPSA, a position he accepted in 1981 and remained in until 1993. During these twelve years he was involved with the organisation of the 7th European Poultry Congress in Paris (France) in 1986 and the 8th European Poultry Congress in Barcelona (Spain). A few months after the congress in Paris, Douwe received the 'Chevalier de l'Ordre du Mérite Agricole' during a special event at the Spelderholt Centre for Poultry Research. This high decoration, handed over by the French Ambassador in The Netherlands, was given to Douwe because of his great contribution to the conference.

During the eighties the Dutch poultry industry received increasing numbers of public comments on how layers were held in cages. Animal protection groups and activists fought for animal rights. Following many difficult discussions between poultry behaviour scientists in the governmental Spelderholt Centre for Poultry Research, animal protection people and governmental officials as well as politicians, Douwe Ehlhardt initiated research on keeping birds in the aviary system. He had to solve many issues including cannibalism, handling manure (including nitrogen emissions), in-house climate conditions as well as preventing floor eggs. Since then most of these

problems have been resolved and, following the ban on layer cages in 2012, provide layer farmers an opportunity to keep layers efficiently in non-cage systems. Today more than 80 % of the layers in The Netherlands are kept in aviary systems.

In 1993 Douwe was asked by the Dutch government to lead a poultry development project in Saudi Arabia. He accepted the offer and spent two years in Riyadh at the Ministry of Agriculture solving poultry husbandry problems in Saudi Arabia. In 1995 he rejoined Spelderholt but had to move to Lelystad when research activities on ruminants, pigs and poultry were concentrated in one research institute called ID-DLO. He worked there till his retirement in 2001.

Ir Douwe Ehlhardt contributed a great deal to poultry research in The Netherlands and worldwide. We have lost an integral scientist, a friend to his colleagues and fellow-workers and a man who, due to his language skills, made people laugh. We will sadly miss him.

Piet Simons