

ELECTION OF HONORARY LIFE MEMBER

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There are a number of reasons, not the least of which was the second world war in which he served with considerable distinction, that were responsible for David Gordon Edgar commencing his working life as a research worker at an age when some of his colleagues were approaching the loftier heights of research administration. He more than made up for lost time, and although undoubtedly his ability would have shown up regardless of circumstances, his determination to clarify issues, to get to the heart of the matter and to seek practical solutions may owe as much to his experience and responsibilities in other fields as to his training in scientific method.



Dr Edgar's first direct involvement in animal production research in New Zealand came in 1952 when, after graduating B.Sc. from Edinburgh University, gaining his M.R.C.V.S. from the Royal (Dick) Veterinary College, and being awarded his Ph.D. degree on studies he carried out at Cambridge under the late Sir John Hammond, he commenced work at the Whatawhata Hill Country Research Station on the reproductive physiology of sheep. Although it was not long before he transferred to Ruakura Animal Research Station, this did not change the area of his research, which continued to be in reproductive physiology, particularly of the ewe.

His industry and his dedication to the task of enhancing sheep fertility are evidenced by the fact that, prior to moving to research administration in 1964, he had published 39 papers in addition to spending two years at Cornell University on a post-doctoral fellowship of the National Academy of Sciences, U.S.A., and carrying out a number of other activities of considerable significance to animal production. Not the least of these other activities was his leadership of the New Zealand Veterinary Association's Technical Committee in the production of two handbooks, *Diseases of Domestic Animals in New Zealand* and *The New Zealand Farmers' Veterinary Guide*. His association with these handbooks is significant not just because of the quality of the handbooks themselves but, more importantly, because of the evidence it provides of his conviction that knowledge is of little value unless it reaches those who can put it to practical use. This conviction was to become even more evident in his subsequent career as a research administrator.

In 1964 Gordon Edgar became Assistant Director (Animal Research) of the Ruakura Agricultural Research Centre, and in 1966 Director of the re-created Ruakura Animal Research Station, a position he held until his retirement in December last.

During Dr Edgar's period as Director, not only did considerable expansion of activities and facilities take place at Ruakura, but, more importantly, he provided positive leadership and guidance to the very diverse group of scientists, technicians, administrators and other staff for whom he was responsible. He provided a climate in which science could flourish. What became particularly evident during this period was his ability to summarize discussion to reach the nub of a problem and to communicate ideas. Thousands of New Zealand farmers who attended the annual Ruakura Farmer Conferences, which he chaired during this period, can testify to this.

The ability to clarify and communicate was also to prove invaluable in his 10-year membership of the New Zealand Dairy Board's Herd Improvement Council as representative of the Ministry of Agriculture. During this period many issues of very considerable significance to the dairy industry in particular and to the livestock industries in general came before the Council for consideration. In the discussions on these issues Dr Edgar displayed to the full the qualities of clarity of thinking and ability to communicate already noted. His determination that scientific knowledge should guide decisions was so tempered by his sense of humour that, if there had been any latent mistrust of the role of a scientist in a farmer's field in the minds of any Council members, this was soon replaced by the thought "I wonder what Gordon thinks?" During this period there is little doubt that Gordon was in large measure responsible for drawing closer together the sometimes divergent views of breed society and herd improvement representatives on the Council, thus advancing the cause of livestock improvement. His initial advocacy at a Council meeting in 1970 of the concept of an overall farmer-controlled livestock improvement organization for beef cattle, dairy cattle and sheep, and his subsequent support of the concept, has not so far borne fruit. This is perhaps more related to the difficulty of mixing oil and water in the absence of the correct emulsifier rather than to there being any flaw in the concept itself.

In addition to the activities already noted, Dr Edgar has been President of the New Zealand Veterinary Association, non-university member of the Veterinary Faculty of Massey University, examiner for Ph.D. degrees at the Universities of Queensland, Canterbury and Cambridge, Corresponding Editor of the *Journal of Reproduction and Fertility*, and President and foundation committee member of the National Fielday Society, as well as being involved in numerous other activities related to agriculture and higher learning.

Dr Edgar has made numerous contributions to furthering the objectives of the Society of Animal Production. His acceptance of Life Membership would honour the Society.