

Vale Dr Norman Royce Adams BVSc, PhD, FTSE, FASAP 12 December 1943 – 22 April 2008

by Rob Kelly, OIC Floreat

The Australian sheep industry has lost a wise and gentle leader. We remember a colleague, friend and mentor, who in his own quiet and considered manner affected all of our lives.

Norm started as a CSIRO Research Scientist in 1971 at The University of Western Australia. I remember it well, as he had an office down the corridor from mine, and while I was battling with a PhD, he was starting an illustrious career that would see us part, then come back together again to tackle new challenges. As he touched my working life in so many ways, the same could be said for most people who have been involved in research in the Australian livestock industries over the past 4 decades - both in CSIRO as well as state departments of agriculture and universities, and importantly the farming industry.



Norm had a passion for understanding the whole animal – its nutrition, endocrinology and physiology, and through this made outstanding contributions to improvements in the productivity and welfare of sheep.

His early work focused on clover disease, a major problem that resulted in very low lambing percentages, sometimes as low as 10% in some flocks. His pioneering work on its histopathology remains the definitive work in this area, with the applied diagnostic tests he developed remaining the standard today. His world-class work on phyto-oestrogens was evidenced by the fact that he was being invited to write reviews on clover disease 20 years after he completed the research work.

From the mid 1980s through the 1990s Norm's research interests shifted to the role of metabolic and reproductive hormones as mediators of interactions between nutrition, reproduction and wool growth. He led projects responsible for developing technologies to increase wool strength within the CRC for Premium Quality Wool, which defined the biology of staple strength and led to the development and adoption of genetic, nutritional and management methods for overcoming the problem. The impact of his research is illustrated by his being co-author of a paper, published in 1993, that has been one of the top 100 most highly cited CSIRO papers in the past decade. In 1998, Norm was appointed as Deputy Director of the Wool CRC, a position he held until its completion in 2001. During this period he also conducted the widely recognised evaluation of sheep whose growth hormone production had been modified, producing critical whole animal evaluation of changes that had occurred.

It was logical then that in the last six years of his work that he commenced studies on the trade-off between production and fitness of the Merino sheep, proposing that extremes in selection for wool may have compromised the reproductive performance of Merino sheep.

Not only through his research, but also his supervision of students and post doctoral fellows, executive roles in the Australian Society of Animal Production, and his welcome presence at many sheep forums, Norm was a friendly face, wise council and science leader to the Australian livestock research community. For his work he was awarded an Australian Centenary Medal (2003).

A man with passion, commitment and time for us all.