

Obituary for Dr Jan Hendrik Hofmeyr¹

***31.12.1925 - †07.06.2021**



(Picture supplied by family)

Dr Jan Hofmeyr, world-renowned and respected Animal Scientist, passed away on Tuesday (8 June 2021) at the age of 95 in Pretoria. He is survived by two sons, Tom and Jan, and their families. His wife, Elizabeth, passed away years ago.

His daughter in law Gerda Hofmeyr, worked for many years at HR and his son Jan, at Meat Science Centre at Irene.

He received his tertiary training at the University of Pretoria up to Masters level and did his PhD at the University of Uppsala in Sweden (1953 – 1956) under the renowned geneticist Prof Ivar Johansson.

He started his career in 1951 as a research officer in beef cattle breeding with the Department of Agriculture at the Mara and Messina Research Stations, where he was involved in the later development of the Bonsmara cattle breed. After completion of his Doctoral degree, he was promoted in 1956 to Senior Animal Geneticist in the division of Animal Husbandry and Dairying in Pretoria. Here he was involved in the development of the National Pig Performance and Progeny Testing Scheme, The National Sheep Performance and Fleece Testing Scheme and the National Progeny Testing Scheme for Dairy Bulls.

During 1961 to 1962 he was a guest research fellow in the Division of Animal Genetics at the CSIRO in Australia, where he worked with the well-known Dr Helen Newton-Turner. On his return, he was appointed as Assistant Director: Animal Science Research in the Department. Here he co-ordinated animal science research and initiated long-term breed evaluations, selection and crossbreeding experiments with cattle and sheep, e.g. the beef cattle crossbreeding experiment at the Vaalharts research station.

In 1968, he was appointed as the second Director of the recently established Animal and Dairy Science Research Institute (ADSRI) at Irene, where he served until his

retirement on 31 December 1990. The performance and outputs of this centre of excellence in animal science research under his leadership, will be a living memory for his contribution to animal science in South Africa. During his career, he set the standard for Animal Breeding and Genetics research in South Africa and was always prepared to share his knowledge with his colleagues and the rest of the world.

In a letter from the legendary J L Lush he remarked: "Hofmeyr is gifted with rare imagination and ingenuity, enabling him to spot facets of scientific problems that might otherwise escape many investigators".

He played a major role in the establishment of the bull testing stations across the country with money made available from the Meat Board, as well as the department's livestock improvement schemes with offices across the country. He also led the negotiations with the Meat Board for the construction and establishment of the Meat Science Research Centre on Irene.

At the scientific level, he played a major role in promoting scientific exchange by organizing international congress and symposia in South Africa and inviting leading scientists to South Africa.

During his career, he was invited to present 23 papers at 18 international congress, conferences and symposia and he was the author or co-author of 150 scientific papers, conference proceedings and reports.

He served on numerous local and international scientific and professional organizations, committees and expert panels. He was president of both the SA Genetic Society (1974 – 1990) and chairperson of the SA Society for Animal Science (1988 – 1990).

The many awards he received include:

- Gold medal from the South Africa Society for Animal Science
- Gold medal from the SA Academy of Science
- International Gold Medal from the German Livestock Breeders' Association
- Special Service Medal from the Italiana Allevatore Associazione
- International Distinguished Service Medal from the European Association of Animal Production

He was also the recipient of two honorary doctoral degrees and received wide recognition from his peers and the livestock industry as a whole.

May his soul rest in eternal peace.

¹ This obituary was written by Prof Magiel Scholtz; Specialist Researcher at the ARC-Animal Production campus (Email: GScholtz@arc.agric.za)