

# Feed sector leaders recognized at Sask. Ag Hall of Fame

## RECOLLECTIONS & REFLECTIONS



LINDA BRAUN

Saskatchewan's feed industry consists of feed ingredient producers, specialty feed ingredient producers, and feed processors who transform crops like barley, wheat, oats, peas, canola, flax and specialty crops into new feeds and feed ingredients.

Saskatchewan Agriculture Hall of Fame inductees Hank Classen (2018), David Christensen (2011), Milt Bell (1989) and Vern Racz (2018) dedicated their professional lives to the betterment of the feed industry and livestock production.

Connecting with producers and end-users has been the cornerstone of their success, and that of the feed industry.

Classen, a retired University of Saskatchewan poultry researcher, said listening to producers gave him a better understanding of their needs and how they match with the feed industry.

"Finding effective ways of utilizing these materials in animal feeding ensures their utilization and better economic returns for producers."

He notes that Saskatchewan feed ingredients tend to be more unique than traditional corn or soybean meal, providing opportunities to grow the industry around the globe.

Christensen, also a retired U of S professor, says most of his research was in response to producer or industry questions about using pea silage or dehydrated alfalfa for dairy cows, or trace minerals and other nutrients in feed formulations.

"Crop Development Centre plant breeders and others have done a tremendous job of crop development and improvement, which necessitated feed ingredient evaluation for them to be fully utilized," he said.

"Our unique ingredients need detailed profiles to be incorporated



David Christensen worked in the U of S's animal and poultry science department.

in feed rations around the world."

Both scientists employed a holistic approach to their work to ensure that the livestock recipients' productivity and health were always realized.

Both remain active assisting graduate students, finishing research publications and often still addressing questions from the industry.

When asked about what they are most proud of in their careers, both emphasized the success of their students they taught and trained.

Milt Bell was an animal nutritionist recognized for his work in feed evaluation and swine nutrition. Of particular importance was his team's work with rapeseed products and the removal of glucosinolates to develop global markets for canola.

"He was the ultimate scientist and is particularly recognized for his work in establishing rapeseed meal in animal feeding. He was also a fine gentleman and had a great sense of humour," fellow SAHF inductee Classen says. Christensen says of Bell: "An almost forgotten contribution was development and use of the laboratory mouse as a pilot animal for swine nutrition work. Using mice gave an evaluation in three weeks from birth with small quantities of product being tested. This work was the basis of the use of the mouse for medical research. Also, less known is his development of milk replacer for calves. The University of Saskatchewan heifer herd



Hank Classen specialized in poultry research.

was the first anywhere to be raised on milk replacers."

Vernon Racz earned a reputation as a bridge builder, connecting crops and livestock sectors, researchers and producers and between Canadian agriculture and the global marketplace.

In 1984, Racz became director of the Feed Testing Lab where he initiated the use of technologies like atomic absorption spectroscopy and near infrared analysis for feed analysis.

He later established and became founding director of the Prairie Feed Resource Centre, now known as Feeds Innovation Institute. Like Bell, through his international consulting, he promoted Saskatchewan and Canadian feedstuffs in Asia, Africa, Middle East, Europe as



Milt Bell was an animal nutritionist recognized for his work in feed evaluation and swine nutrition. | SUPPLIED PHOTOS

well as the Americas.

Racz's definition of retirement was to volunteer his time and expertise to causes and initiatives that made Saskatchewan a leader in agricultural innovation.

Classen says, "Vern was a farmer, as well as working at the university and that gave him an enhanced

ability to see opportunities in the feed industry."

Meeting the nutritional needs of any dairy, beef, sheep, pork or poultry operations is vital to the sustainability of that operation.

Linda Braun is president of Food Focus Saskatoon.