

Dr. Harold A. Henneman

Dr. Harold A. Henneman developed his appreciation for animal husbandry and high-quality livestock on his family's farm in Belmont, Wisconsin. He earned a B.S in 1940 from the University of Wisconsin and later received his M.S. and Ph.D. from Michigan State University. He served as the professor in charge of the Michigan State University sheep flocks from 1950 to 1959 and again from 1962 to 1985. His primary responsibilities were teaching the introductory Animal Husbandry class and sheep production.

Dr. Henneman's real passion was the MSU Suffolk flock. During the decades of the 1960's & 70's he teamed up with shepherd George Good. Together they conducted a breeding program that improved the growth rate and productivity of the flock. Their efforts resulted in the MSU flock gaining an international reputation. Many of their champions were exhibited at National Suffolk Shows in Chicago and later in Louisville.

Under Harold's direction the breeding program was based on sound selection criteria incorporating production records and carcass information long before the industry moved in that direction. MSU hosted an annual production sale on Memorial Day starting in 1970 with the following catalog statement: "In presenting this first sale consignment we are providing as much information as possible to the buyer. The sheep are shorn, sires and dams will be on display and the production records on the flock are included. Each of these factors should add to the accuracy of your selection." He also used the production sale to provide his students with experience in purebred livestock merchandising, emphasizing ethics and customer service.

After dispersing the MSU Hampshire flock in 1973, MSU shocked the sheep world a few weeks later by buying "The King" from Olsen Brothers of Spanish Fork, Utah, for a record-setting price of \$12,600.00. Figuring he could only be fired once, Henneman followed up by purchasing "The Queen" a few moments later for another record price. After receiving the bill, the dean did ask if the decimal point was in the wrong place.

With selection based on production as well as show ring quality, MSU set the pace for Suffolk sales annually with the pinnacle being set in 1979 by selling 49 Suffolks at an average price of \$1,999.12. Most of these were ram lambs. The top ram sold for \$17,500.00.

In the spring of 1985 Henneman wrote a letter to the editor of *Suffolk Banner* magazine revealing the presence of the spider syndrome in the MSU flock and the belief that it was genetic in nature.

The final sale under Henneman occurred in 1985, a Suffolk dispersal that acknowledged the presence of the spider gene in the flock. MSU then repopulated the Suffolks by purchasing sheep believed to be free of the syndrome.

Much criticism was heaped on Dr. Henneman for his position. The Dean of the College of Agriculture at MSU received a letter threatening legal action against it from a then prominent breeder.

Fortunately the truth prevailed and in 1994 Dr. Harold Henneman received the Distinguished Service Award from the National Suffolk Sheep Association. His legacy lives to this day through the MSU Suffolk flock, which continues to be bred and managed by his principles.