Forty years of progress in W.A. animal industries: chief veterinary surgeon retires

Department of Agriculture, Western Australia

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THE Department of Agriculture's Chief Veterinary Surgeon and Chief Inspector of Stock, Mr. C. R. Toop, retired on May 16 after 40 years service to the Department and the State.

He leaves a remarkable record of achievement as a veterinary surgeon and an administrator.

Mr. Toop joined the Department of Agriculture as a young veterinary surgeon in 1926. A graduate of Melbourne University, he had had two years in private practice in South Australia before coming to Western Australia.

He spent two years in the southern part of the State, working largely on the tuberculosis problem in the dairy herds of the metropolitan area. His next posting was to the Kimberleys, where he was the first resident veterinary surgeon. Here he worked from 1928 to 1932 on problems of the cattle industry, particularly buffalo fly and later pleuropneumonia. His work here was the basis of effective confinement of these problems to the Kimberleys.

Recently a campaign was instituted for the total eradication of pleuropneumonia from the Kimberley Division. This has met with outstanding success. Once widespread, the disease is now confined to the Wyndham district.

After his return from the Kimberleys Mr. Toop spent five years as a quarantine officer at Fremantle until in 1937 he was appointed Assistant Chief Veterinary Officer.

His next ten years were occupied largely by field investigations and advisory work, during which time he became very familiar with the State's veterinary problems, travelling widely in the farming areas and becoming well-known to most of the State's farmers.

Swine Fever

A highlight of this period in his career was the swine fever outbreak in 1942. The disease came to Western Australia in pigmeat from the United States, brought in for American servicemen. Scraps were fed to pigs which were later sold at Midland and taken to many parts of the State; some were processed, further spreading the disease organisms when bacon scraps were fed to other pigs.

The outbreak was widespread before it was detected but in spite of this the Department's Veterinary Branch succeeded in wiping it out within three months. This was done largely by a slaughter and destruction policy, and prohibition of swill feeding.

Some 15,000 pigs on 123 separate properties were slaughtered in the process—a relatively small price to pay for complete eradication of the disease.

The swine fever episode helped impress on Mr. Toop the importance of keeping Western Australia free of exotic diseases of livestock and no doubt had some influence on the firm stand he has taken on quarantine precautions on all occasions when similar threats have arisen.
"You don’t realise just what an exotic disease can do to a susceptible animal population until you see the results of an outbreak such as this," he says. "In countries where they have to live with these diseases the animals have more resistance and losses are not so spectacular. In Australia the economic loss could be tremendous."

**Strain 19**

Another significant development during this period was the introduction of Strain 19 vaccine against brucellosis, an important abortion-causing disease of cattle. The Department’s vaccination service started in 1946. Before this, losses from brucellosis were severe and abortion storms with consequent infertility were common in the South-West.

The Strain 19 vaccination service has halted this.

**T.B. Eradication**

In 1948 he became acting Chief Veterinary Surgeon, and was permanently appointed to the position in 1951. Many spectacular advances have been made since then.

He organised and instituted the tuberculosis eradication campaign which started in 1947 and has virtually eradicated this disease from the State’s milking herds. When the campaign began bovine tuberculosis was a very serious disease and a special ward in the Children’s Hospital was allocated to children affected through drinking milk from TB-affected cattle. Today this is no longer a problem. Following extension of the programme to the butterfat herds in 1962 the incidence in these cattle, too, is very low.

Testing was recently further extended to beef cattle and already the low incidence of TB in beef herds gives promise of virtual eradication of this disease from the State’s cattle.

**Footrot**

Perhaps Mr. Toop’s greatest battle—and one of his greatest successes—was his fight against footrot in sheep. His campaign to eradicate this (then) very serious disease from the State’s sheep population began in 1949.

He applied a rigorous quarantine and slaughter programme which at its peak involved inspections of every hoof on every sheep on affected properties.

At first the programme was unpopular, but the results achieved and a successful publicity campaign brought eventual widespread support. Continued inspections and slaughter of carriers whittled down the disease until only two properties remained in quarantine in 1964. About 750 properties had been quarantined and freed of this disease since the beginning of the campaign—and footrot was no longer economically important to the industry.

The recent outbreak on new sheep properties in the South-West came as a disappointment at the end of Mr. Toop’s career in the Department of Agriculture. This outbreak has been attacked as before and results are promising—but he has warned that if footrot became established in the high rainfall areas it could well make sheep raising in the South-West uneconomical.

Other successful animal health campaigns have been those against external parasites of sheep and pullorum disease in poultry.

Like many of his other activities these campaigns depended on the application of strict regulatory measures for success. In his application of these often unpopular but highly necessary measures he was invariably firm and sometimes forceful. But he was always scrupulously fair and never wavered in their application even in the face of political pressures which were sometimes brought to bear on these policies.

**Spectacular Growth**

In 40 years with the Department of Agriculture Mr. Toop has seen spectacular growth in the State’s agriculture and the Department of Agriculture. When he joined in 1926 there were five veterinary surgeons and two stock inspectors in the Department of Agriculture. No Government veterinary officers were stationed in country areas.

Today there are some 23 veterinary graduates and 24 stock inspectors in the Department. Ten veterinary surgeons are stationed at country centres.

The Department’s Animal Division, which he headed as Chief Veterinary
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Surgeon, now has a staff of 99, compared with nine in 1926. Most of this growth has been in the past 10 to 15 years, under his administration.

Cadetship Scheme

One of Western Australia's great agricultural problems has been the dearth of veterinary surgeons. Although they are still in short supply Mr. Toop can claim some of the credit for today's greatly improved position through the Department's veterinary cadetship scheme started when he took over as Chief Veterinary Surgeon. When the scheme started the Department took on two cadets a year; last year the number was seven and there were 23 in training. More than half the present veterinary staff are former cadets.

It is significant that in spite of the need to enforce often unpopular regulations in his capacity as Chief Inspector of Stock Mr. Toop has always been held in high regard by the farmers of Western Australia, as he is within the Department of Agriculture. The State's farmers will join his colleagues in the Department of Agriculture in thanking Mr. Toop for a job well done and wishing him an enjoyable retirement.

Mr. Toop has been a regular and prolific contributor to the Journal of Agriculture. At one stage of his career he contributed an article to almost every issue and his articles covered most of the disease problems of significance to Western Australia's livestock. In recent years the burden of administrative work curtailed his writing but many of the Department's wide range of current animal disease bulletins — usually reprints from the Journal of Agriculture—were written by Mr. Toop. These are revised and reprinted from time to time to ensure that they are kept up to date with modern developments.

New Chief Veterinary Surgeon

THE Department of Agriculture's new Chief Veterinary Surgeon is Dr. M. R. Gardiner, formerly Chief Veterinary Pathologist. Dr. Gardiner joined the Department in 1959 as Senior Veterinary Pathologist.

Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Dr. Gardiner attended Yale University and the University of Pennsylvania, graduating as a Bachelor of Science in Chemical Engineering in 1936. He became a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine in 1940 and from 1942 to 1946 served in the United States Naval Reserve in the Pacific and in Australia.

For two years after the war he practised veterinary medicine in North Queensland and from 1950 to 1959 held a number of appointments in the United States. These included teaching positions and positions in diagnostic and research pathology in the Universities of Pennsylvania, Delaware and Wyoming.

For four years he was Chief of the Division of Pathology at Eaton Laboratories, New York.

Among important research work Dr. Gardiner has carried out in his seven years with the Department of Agriculture has been investigations into the causes of luponosis of sheep. These investigations have been the most intensive ever carried out in the world and have led to an understanding of most aspects of the disease.

Other investigations into biliary cirrhosis and aflatoxicosis of poultry, bovine mastitis and aspects of the selenium problem have been the first of their kind in Australia.