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Contact: National Dairy Shrine
Email: info@dairyshrine.org

Clay to Receive National Dairy Shrine’s Pioneer Award

Five outstanding individuals are being honored with National Dairy Shrine’s Pioneer Award this year in recognition of their longtime service and contributions to the dairy cattle industry. The five join an elite group of industry leaders whose stories and portraits are part of Dairy Shrine’s National Dairy Hall of Fame and Museum in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin.

Dr. John S. Clay, Director of Dairy Records Management Systems (DRMS) at North Carolina State University, Raleigh, North Carolina, and a leader in the Dairy Herd Improvement (DHI) records segment of the dairy industry, is one of this year’s Pioneer honorees. A driving force in the dairy technology area, Clay has helped to bring dairy farming into the “computer age” by developing dairy herd management software and record analysis systems that have helped dairy producers to make more informed, cost-effective decisions on their farms.

After earning Bachelor and Master’s degrees from Virginia Tech, Clay joined the staff at DRMS in 1984 as an Extension Specialist and Manager of Software Development. He was appointed DRMS Director in 1998, succeeding his mentor, Dr. Kenneth Butcher, who is also being recognized as a Dairy Shrine Pioneer this year. Today DRMS provides DHI records processing services and on-farm records management tools to over 2.3 million cows from 11,000 herds nationwide every month.

When Clay joined DRMS his assignment was to direct the development of a software program that would help dairy producers make better management decisions and save them time. In 1985, Clay led the team that created PCDART, the dairy herd management software program and record analysis system that helped transform the dairy cattle industry. Initiated during the early years of personal on-farm computers, “it became the benchmark of the industry and changed forever the management of herd data,” says James Huffard III of Huffard Dairy Farms. The program today is used by some 3600 dairy producers with over one million cows, as well as by many dairy consultants and advisors.

In addition to PCDART, Clay directed the development of DairyMetrics, a web-based herd benchmarking tool, and later negotiated DRMS’s acquisition of PocketDairy and Money Corrected Milk, software programs which assist dairy producers in cowside management and optimizing mating and culling decisions, respectively. Clay also led the team that developed the interfaces between producer/technician software and automated milk recording, heat detection and robotic software that is currently being used by 700 dairy producers with 300,000 cows. “These, and other programs, have led to an increase in the number of


herds and cows processed at DRMS and using DRMS on-farm software,” says Dr. John Wilk, North Carolina State University Emeritus Professor.

Clay played a key role in the dairy cattle industry acquiring access, and then improving the accuracy of phenotypic evaluations for bull fertility, evaluations known currently as Sire Conception Rates (SCR). In his leadership role at DRMS, Clay has been instrumental in supporting and providing data for dozens of initiatives to help researchers at land grant universities explore dairy science. On a number of occasions, DRMS has provided research data to U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) geneticists for traits not previously evaluated nationally so that research could be completed and new evaluations implemented, such as the six new health trait evaluations introduced in April 2018.

In 2013, Clay was instrumental in the transition when the Council on Dairy Cattle Breeding (CDCB) took over management of the National Cooperators’ Database and the calculation of dairy cattle genetic evaluations from USDA. A member of CDCB’s Board of Directors since its inception, he has served on numerous CDCB committees, as well as being Board secretary, vice-chair and now treasurer.

A modest man whose quiet leadership, dedication and ability have earned him the respect of his peers, Clay received the National DHIA Outstanding Service Award in 2003.

Dr. John Clay will be recognized with the Pioneer Award at the 2019 National Dairy Shrine Awards Banquet on Thursday, October 3rd in Madison, Wisconsin. For more information about the banquet, or the students, producers and dairy industry individuals being recognized by National Dairy Shrine, contact National Dairy Shrine’s office at info@dairyshrine.org. To learn more about Dairy Shrine, and how to become a member, visit their website at www.dairyshrine.org.

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Pictures of the honorees are available upon request by contacting at info@dairyshrine.org.