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Butcher 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 will 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.

One of this year’s Pioneer honorees is Dr. Kenneth R. Butcher of Fuquay Varina, North Carolina, a man who devoted his entire professional career to the advancement and improvement of the Dairy Herd Improvement (DHI) records segment of the dairy industry.

After earning Bachelor and Master’s degrees in Dairy Science, Butcher partnered with his brother for three years on a dairy farm in Georgia. Ken’s on-farm dairy background and advanced education in dairy genetics would make him “custom-built” for what would become his life’s work.

In 1969, Butcher joined the staff at Dairy Records Management Systems (DRMS), the DHI processing center which had been founded by North Carolina State University (NCSU) in Raleigh to provide management information to dairy producers in that region. For several years, Butcher led the extension and software development roles for DRMS. In 1984, he was appointed DRMS Director, a position he held until his retirement in 1998. Butcher’s forward-looking leadership, tireless work ethic, and ability to create a “collaborative environment”, helped to take a local DHI processing center and shape it into a national leader in providing dairy herd management services to dairy farmers.

Butcher guided DRMS “through a strong period of growth by fostering an environment of rigorous edits of field data, rapid processing, rich offerings of management information, producer education and broad outreach efforts,” says Dr. John Clay, who succeeded Butcher as DRMS Director in 1998 and is himself also a Dairy Shrine Pioneer honoree in 2019.

During Butcher’s tenure as DRMS Director the number of producers using DRMS services grew by 80% and the number of cows doubled, as more organizations across the United States requested DRMS services. Butcher was at the forefront of recognizing the importance of using the then emerging proliferation of on-farm personal computers for dairy cattle record keeping and analysis. He would lead the transition to using hand-held devices to do data entry, and to generate daily management reports for use on farms.

In the late 1970s, Butcher, along with Dr. Dan Webb from the University of Florida, designed an online service called DART (Direct Access to Records by
Telephone), which was embraced by many producers in the southern United States. DART was one of the first on-farm software innovations by any U.S. Dairy Records Processing Center. It provided a direct upload of individual cow data to the mainframe computer at NCSU, and the subsequent download of various reports directly to the dairy producer’s printer. DART later evolved in 1985 into PCDART, the popular comprehensive on-farm herd management system used widely today.

Providing cost-effective, easily understood and valuable management programs and information to dairy herd owners was always paramount to Butcher. As Glen Easter, a Jersey breeder and president of United DHIA, says, “Ken’s unique career path gave him a special perspective of seeing issues from the dual vantage points of the dairy producer and the technical staff that directed the development and management of DHIA programs and services.”

Butcher served on numerous National DHI committees during his career. A humble, visionary man who never sought the spotlight, Butcher’s endeavors always focused on the “good of the industry”. He received the National DHIA Outstanding Service Award in 1994 and the American Dairy Science Association’s National Dairy Herd Improvement Award in 1987.

Dr. Ken Butcher 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 www.dairyshrine.org.

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