

**MEMORIAL RESOLUTION OF THE FACULTY  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON**

**ON THE DEATH OF ASSISTANT PROFESSOR EMERITUS C. ERNEST ZEHNER**

Cloyd Ernest Zehner, assistant professor emeritus in the dairy science department, died on May 27, 2010 at age 96.

Ernie Zehner was born on December 1, 1913 in Ashland, Ohio. He was raised on a farm and was an honor student in agriculture at Ohio State University. Upon receiving his BS in 1939, his former professor at Ohio State, Edwin Heizer, recruited the 25-year-old Zehner to become herd manager for the UW dairy husbandry (now dairy science) department. Just one year earlier Heizer had been recruited from Ohio State as the founding chair of the department. Zehner and Heizer would become a close-knit team for many years to follow. Zehner's initial appointment was as "assistant," but he was promoted to "instructor" in 1942. In 1950, he advanced to assistant professor of dairy husbandry and received tenure at that rank. In recognition of his contributions to teaching and service to students, he was named honorary member by the student Saddle and Sirloin Club in 1972, and he received the Service to Agriculture Award from the Farm and Industry Short Course Alumni in 1974. After a remarkable 40 years of dedicated service, Ernie retired to a rural home in Poynette, Wisconsin in 1979.

Ernie's responsibilities as herd manager were multi-faceted. At the outset, he assisted Heizer with research and outreach on pioneering work with artificial insemination. Another early initiative of Heizer, facilitated by Zehner, was to upgrade the quality of the dairy herd by acquiring some 20 heifers from a prominent herd in British Columbia. As herd manager, Ernie was the key link between the department's faculty and the dairy cows used in research trials; he assisted by identifying cows eligible for research, implementing research protocols, facilitating sample collection, and more. He also played an important role in the department's instructional mission by assisting with laboratory sections, conducting demonstrations for students, and training student employees for work at the Dairy Cattle Center. He trained the department's dairy cattle judging teams for national intercollegiate competitions five times from 1948 to 1953.

During Ernie's 40 years as herd manager, the research enterprise and herd facilities of the department expanded dramatically. His work began in the Old Dairy Barn that housed his office as well as the cows. Remarkably, he oversaw the development and opening of five new facilities: the "Steel Barn" (1941) in the Hill Farm on Madison's near west side was the site of research on housing, milking parlors, and refrigerated bulk tanks for milk storage; the Electric Research Farm (1946), located off campus, was developed to demonstrate and study the use of electricity for silo unloaders, barn cleaners, ventilation systems, and hay drying; the Dairy Cattle Instruction and Research Center (1954) expanded herd size, provided modern milking and feed handling equipment, included modern office space, and replaced the Old Dairy Barn as the primary site of dairy cattle instruction and research; a new dairy center at the Arlington Agricultural Research Station (1958) replaced the Steel Barn and increased herd size; and finally, the Blaine Dairy Center (1977) was built at Arlington to consolidate operations of the Blaine experimental farm at Lake Mills with the Arlington dairy center. Each of these transitions involved staffing changes and new herd management processes that Ernie managed effectively.

Always, care and well-being of the dairy cows was Ernie's top priority, and he had a keen eye for finding cows in distress. The family's route from Sunday church services in Middleton to their home at Arlington frequently passed by the campus Dairy Cattle Center to check on the cows; such was Ernie's dedication to good animal care. He sought to improve the herd generation after generation by selective breeding. During the 1970s, the department's small Brown Swiss herd was regarded as among the best in Wisconsin. Although selling cattle was not a mission for the herd, visitors would sometimes seek consignment of a prize-winning cow for an elite auction sale. At least two such cows became state champions.

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Ernie was an even-tempered, reliable, conscientious person of the highest integrity. He was a team player, working collaboratively and cooperatively with faculty and staff. He was well organized and adept at managing the many competing facets of his work and competing demands for the use of dairy cows and facilities for instruction and research. He was an excellent manager of dairy herd employees. He was both respectful of and respected by his employees. He trained people for their roles in the dairy operation and guided a large staff of permanent and student employees with a gentle but firm manner. Hunting and fishing were his favorite pastimes. Ernie, Ed Heizer, and other colleagues owned a property on the Flag River near Port Wing, Wisconsin. It was the destination for many fishing and hunting trips for Ernie, Ed, their sons, and others.

As was the custom in the 1940s, the herd manager was provided a home on the agriculture campus to enable off-hours supervision of the dairy herd. The Zehner home was located near Babcock Hall and the Stock Pavilion where Campus Drive now lies. Design of the Arlington Dairy Center included a new home for the herd manager to which the Zehners moved in 1958.

Ernie's marriage to Mary Sheets on October 5, 1940 began a close partnership that extended to 69 years at the time of his death. Mary was known to help Ernie during overnight and weekend hours with animal care tasks such as assisting in the birth of calves. When Ernie retired, the dairy science department presented Mary as well as Ernie with gold watches in recognition of her willing help with animal care. Mary survived Ernie's passing, but later died at age 98 on October 13, 2010.

The Zehners are survived by four children: Barbara (Dean) Johnson, Lodi; Sharon Hultman, Poynette; Larry (Bobbi) Zehner, Madison; and Karen (Jim) Kutella, Lake Oswego, Oregon. Other survivors include five grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

Beloved by his colleagues and the multitude of students he helped to train, Ernie Zehner contributed importantly to advances in Wisconsin's dairy industry as an instructor and facilitator of research.

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