

Foreword: National Institute for Research in Dairying

Loss of a famous name

The National Institute for Research in Dairying closed on 31 March 1985, bringing to an end a research centre that was first established at University College, Reading, in 1912. The Institute moved to the Shinfield site in 1921 and developed into a major international research centre with a staff of some 450. NIRD was at the forefront of the technical innovation that has made the UK dairying industry one of the most efficient and effective industries in the world. The high standard of the research both in milk production and its utilization established the Institute's widespread international reputation.

While remaining part of the University of Reading the Institute was financed almost entirely by the Agricultural and Food Research Council. In common with many other public bodies the AFRC has been subjected to reduced funding and, in addition, has been reassessing the priorities of its research, including the need to increase support for the food element of its programme. To meet this situation the AFRC decided to separate research on milk utilization at NIRD from that on milk production and to amalgamate the production research with that of the Grassland Research Institute. A new Animal and Grassland Research Institute was established on 1 April 1985 centred at Hurley and incorporates facilities at Shinfield and at North Wyke, Devon. The Institute will undertake research on the production and utilization of grass and other forage crops, integrated with the nutrition, physiology and production of both ruminant and non-ruminant animals.

A new Institute, the Food Research Institute, Reading, was formed from the NIRD Food Science Division on 1 April 1985. This Institute will continue to undertake basic and applied research on milk and dairy products, but its remit is expanded to include oils, fats and confectionery, the nutritional quality of food and food process engineering. The new Institute will occupy the laboratory site at Shinfield previously occupied by NIRD and incorporates about 200 members of the NIRD for its initial staffing.

This new Institute is one of three major AFRC Food Institutes. The work of these three Institutes will be coordinated so that the AFRC can provide the best possible strategic and applied research base to support the scientific and technological requirements of the UK food industry.

The name of NIRD will not be lost completely. It is a pleasure to record that a Memorial Fund is being set up to commemorate the name 'National Institute for Research in Dairying' in an appropriate manner, such as a Prize or Fellowship, and the Royal Association of British Dairy Farmers has undertaken to administer the fund in recognition of its long association with the Institute.

GORDON C. CHEESEMAN

Gordon Cheeseman was a member of staff at NIRD for 31 years, and was Deputy Director and Head of the Food Science Division before becoming Head of the Food Research Division at AFRC in 1984. He is also a Visiting Professor in the Food Science Department of the University of Reading.

Future plans

Although research into milk, its conversion into products and their nutritional importance will remain of major significance, the research programme will expand steadily to encompass a wider range of foods. With regard to traditional milk products, research will continue with the aim of improving processing efficiency and product quality, especially acceptability to the consumer. This will include studies of the reduction of cheese ripening time by enzyme treatment, new unit processes, for example membrane processing and ion exchange fractionation, and developing new uses for milk and its components in foods. This work will be supported by a broad programme of fundamental research on, for example, functional properties of protein biopolymers, genetic manipulation of cultures in dairy and other food fermentations, microbial metabolism, properties of food enzymes and on enzyme and chemical modifications of food proteins and fats.

Food process engineering studies will focus on equipment fouling and on heat processing, for instance ultra heat treatment of particulate foods where heat and mass transfer are particularly complex. The long term objectives of the coordinated programme of human nutrition research will be to provide practical data on human nutrient requirements. Existing contacts with the dairy industry are being strengthened and new contacts made with areas of the food industry coming within the widened remit. In particular the Institute will develop a programme of industry sponsored research on sensory aspects of alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages – underpinned by fundamental studies of food acceptability in which Reading aims to be a leading centre.

MICHAEL I. GURR

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