

Global Views

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An Interview with David Butler

David Butler, affectionately known to his customers around the world as the 'Chicken Man', was recently awarded the British Poultry Council's Distinguished Service Award for his contributions to the poultry industry. Here he tells us of his many experiences and achievements:



You have had a long and successful career in the poultry industry. Please tell us a bit about your background.

I completed the National Diploma in Poultry Technology course at Harper Adams College, UK in 1966. After graduating, I started my long association with Ross products, joining Ross Breeders as a customer advisor within the UK franchise service.

In 1967/68 I transferred to Sterling Poultry Eastern Division in a production and customer advisory role, principally with commercial layers at parent and commercial level.

Around 3 years later I moved to Sterling Northern Region as Regional Production Manager for broilers and layers, parent and commercial generations, with additional

responsibility for national replacement pullet production.

At this time I became involved in technical support with Ross France, broiler technical support to Ross Buxted Nitrovit as well as the production of technical support literature and training co-ordination of Sterling technical advisors.

In 1972 I returned to Ross Breeders as Technical Service Manager with responsibility to review and develop management, husbandry and feeding techniques most suitable for Ross products, which at that time also included turkeys. In 1984 I was appointed to the Ross Board as Technical Service Director.

I was responsible for the production of technical transfer literature, e.g. management manuals and technical briefs. In addition, I was committed to the development of a technical support service to include the international market, which required extensive travel commitments, initially to South America, Italy, Greece and Scandinavia. Over the years, these commitments increased to involve current and potential Grandparent franchise customers in Japan, China, Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines, Korea, Taiwan, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, the Middle East, Hungary, Romania, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Ukraine.

In 1996 I relinquished operational responsibilities but continued as a non executive director until 2005 and, thereafter, as consultant with particular input into key markets.

What prompted you to work in the poultry industry?

My principal interest prior to joining the poultry industry was to become involved in commercial animal production, with the ambition to explore and understand the environment versus performance interactions, which could give rise to both biological and commercial improvement. The chicken had to be the animal of choice!



How have you seen the industry change since you started out?

I have witnessed many, many changes over the years. Technology has been one of the factors that have changed the way the industry works at all levels, from order processing through to the hatcheries and the farms. Computers have allowed us to store and access information and have allowed us to communicate with our customers much more effectively.

Genetic developments have also enhanced the industry and this has been one of the most important changes. There was a great need for the birds to keep pace with the development of their environments and genetic initiatives have helped the company to continually develop and produce birds that are fitter and more robust, giving the customers quality and reliable products which are certain to deliver for their businesses. I have known many of my colleagues in Aviagen's R&D department for over 30 years and they have a wealth of experience and knowledge selecting the world's best breeding stock.

What would you consider as your greatest achievement in your career?

I developed a "responsive" bird management technique based upon the "avian growth curve", which was introduced in 1976 and, apart from refinements, remains the definitive broiler breeder management technique world-wide, some thirty years on.

This bird management technique has proved to be a very successful tool in advancing genetic progress in a commercial generation and has aided selection for economically important traits.

A second noteworthy achievement was the establishment of the first effective, highly structured, global technical service by any international breeding company. Aviagen has always been at the forefront of the industry, leading the way with a structured, dedicated and regional customer service approach, as well as providing first class technical information to our global network of customers.

You have also been at the forefront of the 'Aviagen Approach', why is this so important?

The Aviagen Approach is about building relationships with customers, providing regular visits and a quality follow-up service.



The markets in which we work are very diverse and dynamic and can change as the economy of the country changes. The Approach demonstrates to the customer that we are showing a genuine interest in helping their business grow, which in turn has a benefit to Aviagen showing that we not only provide a quality product but we want our customers to be kept up to date with industry developments, to show that we understand the challenges and issues that they face and give them added value to the products that they buy.

This Approach demonstrated to the poultry industry that technical service is important to every level of the business to enhance the product performance and their customers' profitability.

You have been very active in the training and development of Aviagen's technical managers, forming a strong technical team. What aspects do you think are most important in the training and foundation of a strong customer support team?

It is obviously important to equip our Technical Managers with comprehensive knowledge of the Aviagen product range. Technical Managers need to have excellent communication skills, be able to work under their own initiative, be team players and be able to adapt to the many environments, customs and cultures they experience as they move around their designated territory. The training that they receive will equip them to deal with many of the issues they will face and we urge them to draw on their experience as they travel and get to know their customers and their business.



We want them to enjoy this wonderful opportunity and be passionate about their job. In turn, they will then pass on this enthusiasm and knowledge to our customers and provide them with a top quality service.

How did you feel about receiving the Distinguished Service Award?

I felt very proud and humble to receive the award. The ceremony was very special, but receiving the congratulations and praise from colleagues, customers and contacts from all over the world was overwhelming and quite emotional as each and every one took the time to send their best wishes.

My career has given me the opportunity to see the world and meet people from a variety of countries and cultures and I feel very privileged to have had that experience.



I am extremely grateful to Aviagen for providing me with such an opportunity, allowing me to enjoy a most fulfilling and, hopefully, contributory career. Not least of all, I have been part of the process by which Aviagen has become established as the leading poultry breeding company in the world. However, nothing is possible without interaction, impact, contribution and collaboration of people's knowledge, instinct, skills, personal commitment and professionalism. I have been abundantly privileged to work with outstanding colleagues in very diverse activities and at all levels.