

Harold William Bennetts CBE DVSc 1898-1970

Harold Bennetts was born and educated in Melbourne where he graduated BVSc (1919), MVSc (1920) and DVSc (1931). After graduation, he worked for two years as a bacteriologist for the Commonwealth Department of Health in Cairns, then returned to Melbourne as a lecturer in veterinary bacteriology and pathology at the University of Melbourne.

In 1925, he was appointed to the newly-created position of veterinary pathologist to the Western Australian Department of Agriculture in Perth where he worked under conditions of professional isolation with meagre funds and assistance. In 1928-1935, he was seconded from the Department to the Commonwealth Council for Scientific Research so that the greater facilities of that organisation could be used in his studies of important animal diseases. In 1947, he was appointed Principal of the Animal Health and Nutrition Laboratory, a position he held until he retired in 1959.

Bennetts achieved world recognition for his work in the solution of three major diseases of sheep. Two of these diseases, enterotoxaemia and enzootic ataxia, precluded successful sheep farming over wide areas of the agricultural country of Western Australia in sheep. The finding of Bennetts with his colleagues Chapman and Beck that copper deficiency was the cause of enzootic ataxia of lambs was one of the first reported diseases due to trace element deficiency. His identification of clover disease of sheep as due to naturally-occurring oestrogens in pasture plants was also a new concept in veterinary science. His studies of toxic plants culminated in 1956 in the publication, with CA Gardner as co-author, of the book *Toxic Plants of Western Australia*, a work of great and lasting value to agriculturists throughout that State.

Bennetts introduced two new concepts in veterinary pathology: the absorption of bacterial toxins through the gut wall and the relationship of disease and trace element deficiencies. His work was recognised internationally and nationally by, among others, the AVA who awarded him the Gilruth Prize in 1957.

References

Gilruth Prize Award. *Aust Vet J* 1957;33:241-243.

Obituary *Aust Vet J* 1971;47:67-69.

RI Taylor

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