

In memoriam: Prof. Dr. Ferenc Kovács (1921–2015)

Prof. Dr. Hc. mpx. Ferenc Kovács, Member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, beloved and honoured teacher and through many years leader of the University of Veterinary Science, Budapest, and President of the Section of Agricultural Sciences of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, in his 94th year of age, after long, but peacefully tolerated suffering gave back his soul to his Lord on 10th of May, 2015.



Ferenc Kovács was born on the 28th November, 1921 in a small village (Somogyszentpál, Hungary). After finishing his basic studies with top marks in the elementary and secondary school, he was admitted to the then Veterinary Faculty of the Hungarian Agricultural University in 1948 and graduated in 1952 with the best qualification.

His professional career started at the Department and Clinic of Internal Medicine where he worked for nine years (1952–1961). Beside his teaching liabilities, he showed special interest for the digestive, circulatory and respiratory disorders of farm animals and distinguished himself by his diagnostic skills.

His research work yielded a new medicine against bovine fasciolosis (*Distocain ad us. vet.*) which was widely used and contributed to the control of this helminthiasis. His master and teacher, Professor János Mócsy, the head of the department esteemed his capacities and by his suggestion the Council of the then College of Veterinary Science commissioned him with the leadership of the newly established “Research Group for Animal Hygiene”. By the 15/1962/Mg.É.14. Decree of the Ministry for Agriculture this Group became Department of Animal Hygiene in 1962, and Professor Ferenc Kovács was the first duly elected head.

By his initiatives and enthusiastic work, the concept of animal hygiene has developed continuously and gradually shaped to its present form. In his teaching, animal hygiene is the branch of veterinary science, which relying on the knowledge of physiological and ethological demands of animals, describes the preconditions of health preservation and investigates the pathophysiological changes brought about by adverse environmental effects in order to gain information on the aetiology and pathomechanism of multifactorial (production) diseases. On this basis, animal hygiene systematises the preventive veterinary measures with special reference to their economic consequences. Animal hygiene deals primarily with herds and health protection of the herds, therefore the subject is more or less equivalent to the subject “herd health”. The teaching curriculum has developed accordingly and was utilised in the graduate and post graduate education.

In order to gain experiences, he spent his sabbaticals in 1964 and 1966 at the Department of Animal Hygiene of the Veterinary Faculty in Munich. On this basis he built the first Environmental Laboratory in 1968 which was followed by a second one in 1973. These labs with their 12 environmentally controlled chambers and with their sophisticated equipment provided the background for intensive studies in the environmental physiology of livestock and poultry. Further more, to enhance research in environmental physiology, he organised and co-ordinated research programmes in the treatment, disposal and disinfection of liquid manure. With his supervision a great deal of new information was gained and described with regard to mycotoxin contamination of feed commodities. He studied and gained new data on the dynamism of the vertical mobility of heavy metals, nitrates and mycotoxins in the soil-plant-animal-human chain.

Professor Kovács is known as founder of the International Society for Animal Hygiene. He has been a honorary member of the Society and he was elected to honorary president of the Society at the XVth International Congress of the Society in Vienna in July 2011. He worked for 26 years in the management of the Budapest University of Veterinary Science. As Deputy Rector he served several terms between 1961–1973 and 1978–1981. In this position he made the scientific activity of the university organised, revived, and systemised the post graduate education, and extended the international connections of the University.

He served the university as Rector between 1973–1978 and 1983–1990. Major events of his activities included the organisation of the bicentenary commemoration and celebration of the foundation of Hungarian veterinary training (1986). It was him who launched the international teaching programme at the Budapest University of Veterinary Science, which has developed into an accredited and renowned programme with diploma convertible all over the world.

He spent 9 years in the directorate of the Section of Agricultural Sciences of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences first as Deputy President (1990–1996), later as President (1996–1999).

In the 60 years of his professional career Professor Kovács authored more than 30 text- and handbooks or book chapters and hundreds of scientific publications and presentations at home and at international scientific forums. The efficiency of his school is indicated by the performance of his disciples including two members of the Academy, three PhDs, 12 candidates of the Hungarian Academy of Science and 7 professors. His scientific achievements were acknowledged by Honoris Causa Professorships at the Veterinärmedizinische Universität Wien; Tierärztliche Hochschule Hannover, Univerzita Veterinárského Lekárstva a Farmacie v Košiciach; Állatorvostudományi Egyetem, Budapest, Pannon Agrártudományi Egyetem, Kaposvár and Nyugat-Magyarországi Egyetem, Veszprém. He is the holder of numerous Hungarian and international decorations including the Order of Merit of the Republic of Hungary with the Grand Cross. He was given honorary citizenship by citizens of Somogyszentpál.

Professor Kovács was not only an outstanding and conscientious tutor, researcher and leader but set an example for us with his humanity. With him we have lost our paternal friend and teacher, who loved and esteemed his co-workers and disciples. He devoted himself to our veterinary profession and to our Alma Mater.