

merial

# Selections

April 2011

Vol. 7, No. 1

VALUE BEYOND THE LABEL

## Dr. Robert Eckroade

Leaving significant marks in organized poultry veterinary medicine,  
diagnostic poultry medicine and teaching



**Also in this issue:**

Guest Columnist:  
Mark Clements



**Dr. Robert Eckroade has distinguished himself as a researcher in the field of poultry science. However, he will freely admit that he loves the classroom and working with students.**

*Photo courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania.*



## Dr. Robert Eckroade

Trained as a small animal veterinarian, Robert Eckroade has left a significant mark in several worlds – teaching, organized poultry veterinary medicine and diagnostic poultry medicine.

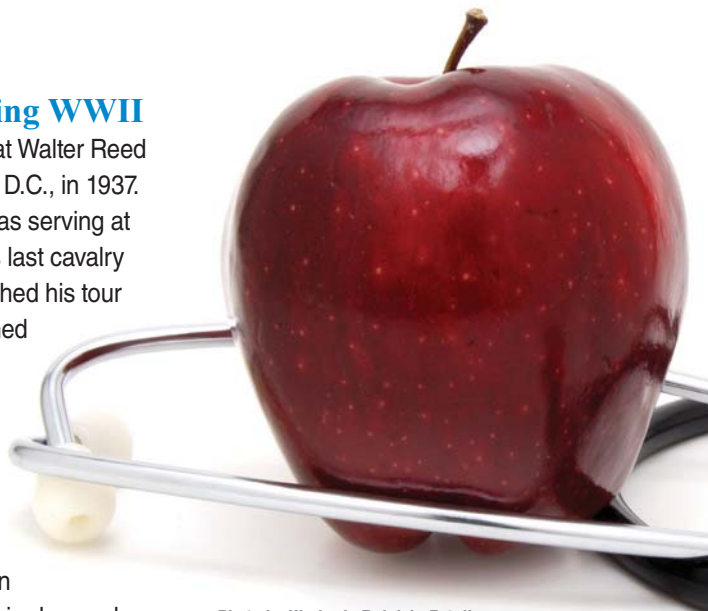
If someone had asked a teenage Robert Eckroade what he was going to do for a career, he would have answered without missing a beat: “I’m going to be a small animal veterinarian.” His answer would have seemed quite believable at the time since that was clearly the direction in which Eckroade was headed.

However, as often happens, life had other plans for the young Eckroade and a veterinary practice wasn’t in the cards for him. Instead, he now looks back at a career as a distinguished and highly regarded professor at the University of Pennsylvania with many accomplishments to his credit in the field of poultry science.

### Growing up during WWII

Eckroade was born at Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, D.C., in 1937. At the time, his father was serving at Fort Hoyle in the Army’s last cavalry unit. After his father finished his tour of duty, the family returned to their hometown of Hazelton, Pa.

Jobs were scarce in those days. However, as part of the new war effort, shipyards were in need of able bodies. This demand for workers led the Eckroades to Portsmouth, Va. A few years later, the family moved to nearby Cradock, Va. There, his father served as both



*Photo by Kimberly Reinick, Fotolia.com*

a fireman and as a policeman at the Portsmouth Shipyard.

Eckroade remembers those early years fondly – his parents worked tirelessly, and Cradock was a safe community for children. “We had to be home by dark – that was it,” Eckroade recalls. He and his brother Bill started school and went through all 12 grades in Cradock. They even went through the Boy Scouts program in Cradock and earned their Eagle Scout Awards there.

In 1944, Eckroade’s father was once again called into service. From 1944 to 1946, the elder Eckroade served as a military policeman in Germany. After his service ended and he returned home, life was simple and Eckroade’s father and mother worked without break. “I don’t think they ever took a vacation,” he says. The priority in the household was clear: the Eckroades were saving up for their children’s education.

Ultimately, all the hard work paid off. All three Eckroade children went on to college and each became successful in their field – Dr. Eckroade as a veterinary poultry specialist, his brother as a geophysicist and his sister as a pharmacist.

## College years

Not many people are fortunate enough to have a clear vision of their career path when they are young, but Eckroade always



**Top:** Dr. Eckroade worked with the American Association of Avian Pathologists for over two decades as the group’s secretary-treasurer. Here he is shown with the group’s board of directors in 2003. Photo courtesy of the American Veterinary Medicine Association.

**Left:** Dr. Eckroade presents The Bruce Calnek award to Dr. Dave Halvorson of the University of Minnesota. Photo courtesy of the American Association of Avian Pathologists.

**Right:** Dr. Eckroade stops for a moment at an AVMA conference to talk with Dr. Elizabeth Krushinskie, past president of the AAAP. Photo courtesy of the American Veterinary Medicine Association.

knew he wanted to work with animals. Even at an early age he enjoyed spending time with pets. “We always had a dog or a cat or a snake. We even had a duck,” Eckroade says.

Furthermore, going to college was never seen as a burden by the young Eckroade.

In fact, it was a chance to follow his childhood dream.

However, Eckroade’s goal of attending college wasn’t an easy goal to reach, and finances were the primary challenge. Like his parents,

Eckroade worked nonstop to earn money for his education. As an undergraduate at Virginia Tech he worked in the university’s meat lab during the academic year. During the summers he cut grass, washed cars and worked in a foam rubber factory. Later, when Eckroade was at veterinary school, he swept floors in a factory for two hours every evening and then unloaded a Sears truck in the middle of the night.

Despite his extraordinary efforts to finance his college education, there was one aspect of Eckroade’s early

# The march of globalization and the poultry industry

By Mark Clements, Editor, *Poultry International* magazine



Mark Clements,  
Editor, *Poultry International*  
magazine

Globalization cannot be stopped. When I was at university, admittedly a good while ago, removing trade barriers and sourcing from the most efficient producer was always portrayed as being positive. If problems should arise, then the market would correct itself.

Of late globalization has been increasingly called into question. While there is a general consensus that the world has become richer as a result of globalization, this wealth has not been evenly spread and there are many in the world who have failed to be pulled out of poverty or have seen their incomes decrease. We may still believe in market forces, but those who once benefitted from them are now beginning to see there is always a cost somewhere and tighter regulation is becoming more attractive, at least to those who are feeling the pain.

## New order

In addition to this, those who have become richer have also become better educated – and with education questions are asked. One only has to look at the changes taking place in the Middle East to see how rising living standards and education can lead to instability and change. Far be it from me to say whether this change will be good or bad, but it certainly disrupts established ways of doing things and leads to uncertainty.

In a global economy, change is inevitable. If one looks at the poultry industry, there are now countries exporting meat that many consumers have only dreamt about. While there may be consumer movements in some countries encouraging the purchase of locally produced goods, imported product still takes up a significant share of shelves in supermarkets and space in restaurants.

As new and more efficient producers enter the market, the space occupied by established producers will be surrendered. While other factors increasingly come into play for some consumer groups, traditional wisdom has it that consumers want the cheapest possible product and country of origin is no safeguard.

## Efficiency is king

In a globalized market, efficient production is king. Barriers to trade that still remain are, little by little, falling. As countries begin to drop – or harmonize – their economic regulations, we have a world where there are countries in a *political* sense, but not in an *economic* sense. As a result, producers must rely on efficiency, not their location, in order to be successful. Country of origin is becoming less important to consumers. In a world with no economic countries, only the fittest will survive.

The opportunities to become the fittest do exist and they exist not only in the form of management, but also in the form of inputs. Think carefully about the choices that need to be made to ensure your place in the world economy. In a world that has no economic countries, you are in the global economy — like it or not.

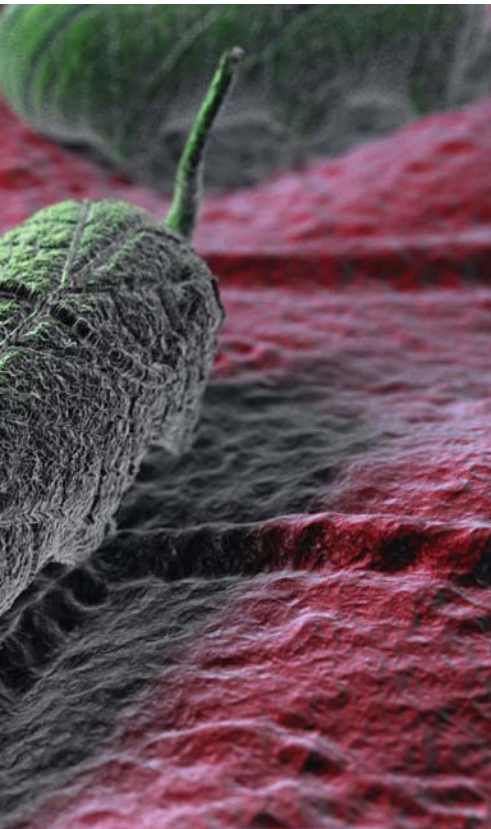


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college life that was quite ordinary: his grades. Thankfully, this changed when Eckroade got married. The combination of his wife's support and a more disciplined home life caused Eckroade's grades to improve dramatically. In fact, they improved so much that after finishing his work at Virginia Tech he was accepted to the prestigious School of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Georgia.

## Introduction to poultry science

At the University of Georgia, Eckroade met Don Davis, a man who would ultimately change Eckroade's career path. Davis introduced Eckroade to poultry, and Davis' enthusiasm for poultry science intrigued the young Eckroade. This was a scene that would be mirrored later in Eckroade's career as he, too, would intrigue students about the



*Research conducted in the area of Salmonella enteritidis by Eckroade and his colleagues has led to the development of the Pennsylvania SE control program. The program has proven to be extremely efficient and is the basis for a national program. Photo by pseudolongino, BigStockPhoto.com*

working conditions prompted Eckroade to change his career away from small animal medicine. As he headed to the University of Wisconsin for additional graduate work, he planned to pursue a path in poultry medicine.

However, when Eckroade entered the veterinary science department at the University of Wisconsin, he was told “Forget about poultry. There’s no way you’re going to do a Ph.D. in poultry.” As a result, Eckroade temporarily set aside his interest in poultry and in 1967 he was awarded a three-year National Institutes of Health post-doctoral fellowship in pathology. Ultimately, he received a Master of Science and a doctorate in pathology and veterinary science.

Eckroade’s specific area of study at Wisconsin was mink encephalopathy, a slow-acting disease similar to Mad Cow Disease or Kuru. Eckroade’s research consisted of describing the development of lesions in the brain of infected mink and testing species susceptibility. He found it could infect and produce a clinical disease in three

species of monkeys. “That created quite a stir there,” he recalls. Eckroade’s discoveries would later prove useful in the study of diseases like Mad Cow.

Eckroade was and is proud of the work he accomplished at Wisconsin. However, when his time there came to an end, he was pleased to be able to pursue the field that truly held his interest – poultry science.

## University of Pennsylvania

After Wisconsin, Eckroade taught for a time at the University of Delaware before receiving two offers: one from the University of Pennsylvania and one from Penn State. It was a difficult decision, but Eckroade wanted a chance to teach students, and the University of Pennsylvania offered that opportunity. “Students are exciting,” Eckroade says. “You only get a few that you know that you really got to, but that’s all it takes.”

As a teacher, Eckroade has had a tremendous impact. In 1980, he shocked the Pennsylvania campus by winning the Lindback Foundation

possibilities of poultry science.

Nonetheless, after graduating from Georgia with his D.V.M. in 1962, Eckroade pursued a private mixed veterinary practice. At the same time, he worked for the USDA as a veterinary supervisor poultry inspector for two years. He subsequently took a job as director of the North Carolina Poultry Diagnostic Laboratory in Wilkesboro, N.C.

Eckroade found that the difference in work environments was a positive one for him. “I always wanted to be a small animal practitioner until I found out about poultry – and people,” Eckroade remarks. With a wry smile he adds, “In my 39-year career in poultry medicine, there have probably never been more than one or two instances when somebody was mad at me. However, in small animal medicine, somebody was upset at me at least once a week!”

The combination of interesting diagnostic opportunities coupled with better



*Dr. Eckroade is known for his ability to make poultry interesting to students. Here he enjoys a light-hearted moment at “Eck Road” with a group in Allentown, Pa.*

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Award for Excellence in Teaching. As

Eckroade observed,

“The idea that students in a veterinary school would like poultry medicine was kind of outstanding.”

Eckroade was also voted best

awards, Eckroade was recognized by the Pennsylvania Veterinary Medical Association as Pennsylvania's Veterinarian of the Year in 1984. In 2002 he was given the Alumnus of the Year Award by the University of Georgia College of Veterinary Medicine.

### National leader

Pennsylvania's liberal policy on how one could spend their work time gave Eckroade the opportunity to

work with the American Veterinary Medical Association Programs; serving as vice-chair and chair of the Transmissible Diseases of Poultry for the United States Animal Health Association; serving as resident director of the Pennsylvania Animal Diagnostic Laboratory system at the University of Pennsylvania; serving on the USDA Secretary's Advisory Committee on Foreign Animal and Poultry Diseases; serving on the USDA Live Bird Market Working Group;

“

Serving the AAAP gave me the ability to meet almost every prominent poultry disease person in this country and other countries.

”



lecturer by the class of 1982. In addition, he's extremely proud of his required poultry course for all veterinary students at Pennsylvania, which brings a basic knowledge about the poultry industry and its disease problems to some 3,000 small animal practitioners. The way Eckroade sees it, these practitioners will in turn have influence within the veterinary community on matters vital to the poultry industry.

In addition to his teaching

develop a first-rate poultry diagnostic laboratory and to join the American Association of Avian Pathologists as secretary-treasurer, a position he held for 22 years. “Serving the AAAP gave me the ability to meet almost every prominent poultry disease person in this country and other countries,” he says.

Eckroade's work with the AAAP also led to other leadership roles representing poultry. These roles included membership and

and serving on the USDA Exotic Newcastle Disease Task Force.

### Work in poultry science

In addition to building enthusiasm for poultry science in the classroom and providing leadership for the industry at the national level, Eckroade has also contributed greatly to the field of poultry science. In fact, his study of salmonella transmission is directly responsible for some of the

## Merial Update

As most of you know by now, on March 22, 2011, Merck and sanofi-aventis announced their mutual decision to terminate their agreement to form a new animal health joint venture. As a result, Merial and Intervet/Schering-Plough will continue to operate independently. This means that Merial will remain the animal

health business of sanofi-aventis. I can assure you that Merial and sanofi-aventis remain committed to the animal health business.

I am extremely proud of the level of customer focus that the Merial Select team maintained during this time of uncertainty. As well, I can assure you that Merial Select will continue to serve our

procedures in use today.

Eckroade, working with his colleagues Drs. Charles Benson and Sherrill Davison, discovered that individual birds in *Salmonella enteritidis*-infected flocks don't produce infected eggs very often, and the team developed methods for discovering salmonella despite its reticence. By testing 1,000 chickens four times every two weeks, they saw that infection could be found with a high degree of confidence. Once this was discovered, Eckroade and his colleagues helped develop the Pennsylvania SE control program that has proven to be extremely efficient. In fact, it is the basis of the national program that is just now being implemented.

His work in the field led to Eckroade receiving the New York Farmers Award for Outstanding Achievement in the Field of Agriculture or Veterinary Science in 1989. Subsequently, in 1996, he received the Special Service Award from the American Association of Avian Pathologists for his work in the field.

Eckroade says he deeply appreciates the many accolades he has received from the poultry industry and academia in general. However, he notes that he takes special pride in his work overseas. He has traveled to and lectured in Albania, Australia, Chile, Canada, Columbia, Ecuador, France, England, Japan, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, Russia, Scotland, Turkey and Venezuela

to educate individuals there about salmonella and avian influenza.

## Retirement

Eckroade's days are spent a bit differently now. Together with his wife of 54 years, Eckroade lives in a beautiful house nestled in the corner of a 100-acre farm. There is a pond out back and dogs run to greet every car that approaches. His daughter and two of his grandchildren live in a house on the farm, and one of his sons is about to move his family to the farm as well.

Eckroade enjoys talking about his grandchildren and the success of his children. One son, Bob, has had a 28-year career with W.L. Gore in product development. His son Bill is the Deputy Chief of Operations for Health, Safety and Security for the U.S. Department of Energy, and his daughter Sherri is a diabetic nurse educator.

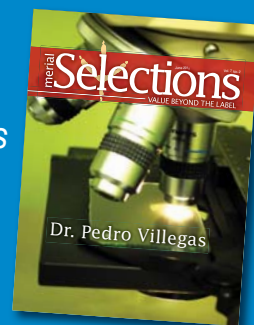
He notes that the "heroes" in his personal life are his parents, Kermit and June Eckroade, and his wife, Carlene. In his academic training, he remembers Drs. S.M. Chou, Robert Hanson and Gabrielle Zu Rhein at the University of Wisconsin for their commitment and support.

It has been quite a journey for Eckroade since his early days in Cradock, Va. However, he will quickly tell you that through it all he has been a very lucky man. **ms**

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## Coming in June:

Don't miss the upcoming *Merial Selections* June issue that will feature Dr. Pedro Villegas.



Don't forget to **subscribe** to receive the June issue in your inbox!

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— Keith Pritchard, Executive Director, US Business Operations, Avian

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