

The South African branch of the World's Poultry Science Association

The early days by Prof Rob Gous

Prior to 1981 the WPSA in South Africa was administered by the South African Poultry Association (SAPA), with Zach Coetzee acting as the secretary of both associations. An annual AGM was held at the same time as the SAPA congress, when a (usually local) poultry scientist would deliver the annual WPSA lecture. Some of the local scientific community, such as A M Gericke, Eugene Brock, Cliff Saunders and Lionel Abrahams, kept the association going mainly as a conduit for access to the popular Journal that was published by the World body. No meetings were held, other than the AGM, so the Association was extremely low-key and almost non-functional.

In the late 1970's, Julian Mervish of Tokai Chicks in the Western Cape, introduced the concept of an annual 'Tokai Day', to which he invited a number of internationally renowned speakers to present their research and expertise to a scientifically starved audience of poultry producers. This event proved extremely popular during the few years of its existence. In 1981 the incumbent local WPSA committee conceived the idea of emulating the Tokai Day, but under the auspices of the WPSA. Sponsorship was offered by Elanco Animal Health, who paid for an overseas speaker who would be asked to deliver two lectures on the day. The rest of the programme would be filled with local or visiting poultry scientists. These 'Scientific Days' were initially held on the Agricultural Research Council's facilities at Irene near Pretoria, and the catering was done by the ARC staff and their partners. The venue was then moved to the University of Pretoria, where the event was held for many years. For a number of good reasons, the venue was moved again, in 2006, to the CSIR conference facility where it continues to be held to this day.

There is no doubt that the WPSA Scientific Day became the prime event in the calendar of poultry scientists and technical representatives in this country: we seemed to have found the right combination of factors (speakers, venue, organisers, food, and sponsors). Elanco Animal Health made an extremely valuable contribution to this event over the years. Their generous sponsorship of the event, and their commitment to advertising the event, organising the flights and itinerary of the guest speaker each year, and taking care of registrations, was a contributory factor to the success of the event. In 2006 the cost of the event became too high for Elanco to sponsor the entire event, and they agreed that the sponsorship should be shared.

In the first years of this event being organised by the WPSA, the international speaker would be given the opportunity to travel to Stellenbosch and to Pietermaritzburg, to deliver lectures to the students at the universities there. This gave the visitors an opportunity of seeing different parts of the country, and this proved to be great drawcard in encouraging highly regarded international poultry scientists to visit South Africa. Animal and poultry science students at the universities visited responded enthusiastically to these visitors, and many of the students were probably encouraged to choose poultry science as a career as a result.



Prof Gous was Chair of the SA branch of the WPSA for over 20 years and was a Vice-President of the World Branch of the WPSA for four terms, during one of which he was the Senior Vice-President