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1-1-2002

Memorial Khem Shahani

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Hutkins, Robert W.; Maxcy, Burt; and Taylor, Steve, "Memorial Khem Shahani" (2002). *Faculty Papers and Publications in Animal Science.* Paper 742.
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Journal of Dairy Science, Volume 85, Issue 2, February 2002, Page 458

Memorial
Khem Shahani

Khem Shahani, Professor Emeritus at the University of Nebraska, died recently in Sicily while on a speaking tour and visiting family. Professor Shahani had a long, illustrious career in dairy microbiology and was one of the world's leading researchers in the area of probiotic bacteria. This is a field that, in the past few years, has seen remarkable growth and interest in the scientific community. Khem was one of only a few scientists who early on worked toward establishing a scientific basis for the role that probiotics play in nutrition and health. His outstanding record of research, teaching, and service earned him many awards, including the American Dairy Science Association Borden Award for Excellence in Research, the ADSA Pfizer Award, and the ADSA Dairy Research Foundation Award. Professor Shahani was the first to have received all three of these major awards from ADSA. In addition, he received the Nordica International Award from the American Cultured Dairy Products Institute, and in 1983, he was elected as a Fellow of the Institute of Food Technologists.

Professor Shahani was active in several professional societies, including the American Dairy Science Association, the Institute of Food Technologists, the American Society for Microbiology, the American Oil Chemists' Society, Gamma Sigma Delta, Sigma Xi, Gamma Alpha, and Phi Tau Sigma. He was the author of more than 200 scientific publications in leading journals and wrote numerous monographs, book chapters, and review articles on lactic acid bacteria. Shahani enjoyed an international reputation and traveled around the world. Professor Shahani was an excellent speaker and was an invited lecturer at numerous conferences and symposia. He was a Member of the Expert Advisory Panel on Food Hygiene, WHO of United Nations, and consulted with the International Center for Diarrheal Diseases Research in Bangladesh. Shahani served on the Jury of the Institut Yoplait International for research grants from 1986 to 1991 and was a keynote speaker at the 2nd International Symposium on Lactic Acid Bacteria, Wageningen, The Netherlands in 1987.

Khem served as an advisor and mentor to many graduates who went on to become professors at major universities and to assume leadership positions in industry. Professor Shahani had boundless enthusiasm for his life's work, and even after his retirement, he still led an active research program. It is a testament to Khem's devotion to science, that even years after his official retirement, his quest for knowledge and learning more about probiotics and dairy microbiology never stopped.

Khem was born in India in 1923. He earned his B.S. and M.S. from the University of Bombay, and his Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin. He was at the University of Illinois and Ohio State University before coming to the University of Nebraska in 1957, where he remained for the next 44 years. In 1981, he founded Nebraska Cultures, a manufacturer and supplier of Lactobacillus acidophilus DDS-1 and other probiotic products. Khem and his wife Leona raised four boys, Michael, twins Roger and Ray, and Robbin. Khem was an accomplished dancer, and he and his children participated in numerous ballet productions, including 14 years in the Nutcracker Ballet.

Khem was generous, kind, and loving, and full of good humor. The faculty, staff, and students at the University of Nebraska were fortunate to have known Khem Shahani as a colleague, teacher, and friend.

—Robert Hutkins, Burt Maxcy, and Steve Taylor
University of Nebraska, Lincoln