

John E. Foster, 1903–1997: A brief biography

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John Erwin Foster was born on April 1, 1903, in Jefferson in Ash County, North Carolina. Reared on an 800-acre livestock farm in Ash County, he interrupted his high school education to work on the farm. Working as assistant manager of the farm for several years and as manager for two years grounded Dr. Foster in the practical aspects of successful livestock production. This early livestock experience, in addition to his teaching and extension activities, became the major emphases of his professional career. Foster attended North Carolina State College and was a member of both the crops and livestock judging teams. He participated in the intercollegiate contest at the International Live-

stock Show in Chicago, where he achieved the highest score to date. He was also a member of the wrestling team for four years, competing in light and welter-weight divisions. Graduating with high honors, he was awarded the B.S. degree in Animal Husbandry in 1926. He continued his education at Kansas State College while working half-time as a teaching and research assistant and completed work for the M.S. degree in 1929.

Foster's career in academia began with an appointment to the position of instructor in the Animal Husbandry Department at North Carolina State College in 1928, which was quickly followed by promotions to Assistant Professor (1930) and to Associate Professor (1934). He was a junior faculty member during the era of animal production research when there was extensive interest in feeding trials with all species of farm livestock. It was widely recognized that different crops and different soil/climate conditions contributed to variation in nutrient quantity and quality of feedstuffs. He was deeply involved with research evaluating feed crops of regional origin and their ability to support high levels of production under the best husbandry practices. The several feeding trials that he conducted during this time included both beef cattle and swine. His work came to the attention of Dr. F. B. Morrison of Cornell University, and Morrison accepted Foster as a student in the Ph.D. program. Cornell and North Carolina State agreed that data collected by Foster at North Carolina State were acceptable for the doctoral degree. He completed his dissertation and was awarded the Ph.D. in 1937. Then he returned to North Carolina State and was promoted to Professor in 1941.

Dr. Foster's academic career at North Carolina State might be characterized as that of a "generalist" in animal husbandry. He taught courses in beef cattle and sheep, coached livestock judging teams, and conducted research with beef cattle, sheep, swine, draft horses, and mules. He judged numerous livestock shows and fairs and served as superintendent of the Beef Cattle and Sheep Departments at the North Carolina State Fair from 1928 through 1946. He reported his research findings as author or co-author of 24 experiment station bulletins and frequently contributed articles to agricultural publications and newspapers.

As a tribute to Dr. Foster's expertise and organizing skills, he was appointed Professor and Head of the Animal Science Department at the University of Maryland in 1947. His professional competence in teaching, research, and extension activities, first demonstrated in

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North Carolina, continued throughout his distinguished career in Maryland, and he remained active in all phases of the department's program. He effectively taught undergraduate courses, continued to publish scientific papers and popular articles, and worked enthusiastically with many extension activities. Among his earlier efforts were arguing the need for and securing funding to develop an on-campus swine teaching and research facility, as well as a beef cattle teaching and research farm. He was adamant in his view that hands-on teaching and student field trips to a wide range of production unit types were essential for animal science students. He fully appreciated the importance of "text book learning," but insisted it must be combined with experience to achieve a comprehensive knowledge of livestock production.

John Foster's sincere concern for the well-being of those around him was obvious and key to his success in extension activities. Shortly after his arrival in Maryland, he worked closely with the organizers of the Eastern National Livestock Show to make it a major regional show in the post-World War II era. His many years as secretary and superintendent of the beef cattle show and the intercollegiate livestock judging contest extended his influence beyond the state's borders. Evidence of the esteem that was accorded to him by the livestock industry and his professional colleagues can be found in his many honors. He was granted life membership in both the Maryland Beef Cattle Producers, Inc. and the Maryland Angus Association, received the Maryland Sheep Breeder's Association Certificate of Honor, and was elected director of the Maryland Hereford Breeders Association. He also continued livestock judging at the county, state, and regional show levels, emphasizing structural soundness, as well as the need to combine live evaluation with objective production level measurements.

Foster continued his applied research interests while head of the department at the University of Maryland primarily through collaborative support of other faculty. Although his faculty duties for teaching, extension, and administration were a full-time workload, he found time to participate in research projects for beef

cattle, sheep, and swine, as well as manage the beef cattle research herd. These activities resulted in authorship or co-authorship of over 20 research papers or popular articles.

Foster was a member and active in the affairs of The American Society of Animal Production (ASAP) while at North Carolina State. During that time, he was elected secretary and chairman of the Southern Section of the society. He was also elected chairman of the North Atlantic Section while at Maryland. Subsequent to holding office in both the Southern and North Atlantic Sections, he served a total of five years as a director of the society's national executive council. The society also tapped into his interpersonal skills, professional background, and reliability when they appointed him to represent them on the Committee on Intersociety Cooperation for 12 years, and the Scientific Manpower Commission for 11 years. He was secretary of the Commission for three years. Additionally, he represented ASAP/American Society of Animal Science (ASAS) on the Policy Committee for Scientific Agricultural Societies and served on a number of ASAP/ASAS special committees.

An active member of the University of Maryland community, John was elected to the university senate. His participation on several senate committees including chairing the Senate Committee on Intercollegiate Competition, a high-profile and occasionally contentious committee, and three other senate committees. His service on one or more campuswide or college committees continually spanned his 21 years at the University of Maryland.

The following comments on Dr. Foster's personal characteristics are taken from a tribute given at a recognition dinner prior to his retirement in 1968: "His participation in civic and community activities and his interest in students, colleagues and livestock producers as human individuals all identified a humanist who was also a scientist. A gentleman and a scholar truly describe this man." John and Emeline Foster married in 1933 and became the parents of a daughter, Margaret, and a son, David. And finally, no biography of John Foster would be complete without mentioning that he was an avid fisherman and sports hunter.