

## Dr Ir Willem Feekes, 1907-1979\*

Willem Feekes was born on 27 December 1907 at Meester Cornelis (Java). For his university education he came to the Netherlands, where he obtained the academic title of 'ingenieur' at the Agricultural University of Wageningen in 1930. From 1931 he was a staff member for 3 years on the 'Commissie voor het botanisch onderzoek van de Zuiderzee en omgeving'. He was especially interested in the vegetations on alluvial and reclaimed virgin soils. This research, of which Feekes always said that its objective was so ambitious that it could provide interesting work to various research workers, was carried out with energy and enthusiasm. The data of this study were the basis of a paper 'Development of the natural vegetation in the Wieringermeer Polder, the first large reclamation of the Zuyderzee', on which he took his doctor's degree at the Agricultural University of Wageningen in 1936.

In the mean time he joined the 'Technische Tarwe Commissie' in 1934, as an agricultural scientist. Here he started a detailed and ambitious study on particular groups of factors, which had already been found to be of great importance for wheat quality and its control. This study was not limited to the quality aspects of the home-grown wheat varieties; soon the complete development physiology of wheat was included in this study. In the four years Feekes was a member of the 'Technische Tarwe Commissie', he pioneered in this field of study and collected a profusion of data. The results were published in a number of reports, of which the last titled 'De tarwe en haar milieu' was published in 1941. This thorough study may be considered as a standard work for the later cereal research. Among others, this is the first time that the Feekes' scale for the development stages of the wheat plant is mentioned, a scale which is used throughout the world.

In November 1938 he left the 'Technische Tarwe Commissie', because he was appointed to the Scientific Staff of the Board of Directors of the Wieringermeer, a function which he changed after the war for that of manager of the breeding establishment (in the Northeast Polder) of the firm G. Geertsema. By accepting this function Feekes returned to the sphere of cereals, a field in which he was active with enthusiasm and energy, since.

A just started breeding establishment, of course, cannot immediately introduce new varieties. Therefore Feekes set out to foreign countries to find cereal varieties which might be successful also in the Netherlands. Before long it appeared that he was admirably suited for such missions. A sharp observation, an excellent memory, a systematic method of working and great stamina enabled him to travel regularly throughout Western Europe and to form an idea of the stock material present on the breeding establishments. The result of these explorations was that some new varieties were included in the Dutch List of varieties

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(e.g. Heine's VII, Peko, Orca, Tadorna and Caribo), increasing the yield level of wheat varieties grown in the Netherlands appreciably, which was of great importance for Dutch arable farming. Heine's VII and Tadorna were abandoned after a few years because of great susceptibility to a new yellow rust physio, which contributed to Feekes' interest in cereal diseases, since then. Until his death Feekes was active in breeding wheat varieties, also when later he was appointed a technical director at Geertsema.

When after the war plans were developed to form a project association for cereals, of course Feekes was also involved. After developing in 1950 the 'Stichting voor Coördinatie van Cultuur en Onderzoek van Broodgraan (Cocobro)', Feekes was appointed as the representative of the Dutch Plant Breeders' Association on the board and the board chose him as a vice-chairman. In 1955 this foundation was changed into the Nederlands Graan-Centrum, of which Feekes was soon unanimously elected the Chairman; he remained so until shortly before his death. Together with Dr S. Broekhuizen, who as a secretary-expert was the executive manager of the foundation, Feekes was the making of the Nederlands Graan-Centrum. Via his membership of the board, but also as a chairman of various Working Groups, Feekes always advocated a dynamic approach of the many problems in the field of cereals. He always tried to see the problems in the widest possible perspectives, which led to inter-European co-operation for many aspects. Together with others he initiated the European Association for Research on Plant Breeding (Eucarpia), the European and Mediterranean Cereal Rusts Foundation and the European Cereal Atlas Foundation.

Of course, as a member and often as a member of the board, Feekes was active in a great number of Dutch and foreign associations and organisations. Especially his talent to stimulate and inspire people enabled him to contribute importantly to the research of cereals in the widest sense of the word in and outside the Netherlands. He was awarded the Broekema plaque for this with the fitting inscription: 'For vigorous pioneer work between plant and bread'.

In 1978 he was decorated to Officer in 'L'Ordre Grand-Ducal de la Couronne de Chêne' of the Grand-Duchy Luxembourg.

After an illness of some months Feekes died on 9 February 1979 at Haren (Groningen), leaving a wife and four children.