



Inducted: 2009

For over 50 years, Dr. Switzer demonstrated a genuine interest in people and possessed an unselfish passion for the agricultural industry. A former Ontario Deputy Minister of Agriculture, he facilitated the improvement of relationships between governments and other stakeholders in agriculture. As Dean of the Ontario Agricultural College, he developed curricula that focused on the broader issues of the environment, global agriculture and addressing agriculture as a business. Through his teaching excellence, as a professor at the OAC, he influenced many students who are now leaders in the Canadian agri-food industry.

**DR. CLAYTON MACFIE SWITZER
1929-**

Clayton Macfie Switzer was born in Ekfrid Township to parents Wilford and Marion Switzer. Shortly thereafter they moved to a farm in Caradoc Township. It was from there that Clay went to S.S.#6 Caradoc before moving on to attend high school in Strathroy.

During these high school years he worked on his father's farm and neighbouring tobacco farms. Like many rural kids he became involved with 4-H and in particular the potato club. It was through this activity that he first met Agricultural Representative Keith Riddell and his two assistants Gord Bennett and Ken Lantz. The impression they made on him was perhaps a deciding influence on his future education decisions.

In his last year of high school Clay considered whether he should return home and farm with his father or go on to university. He had been toying with the idea of going to Western as it was close to home and it had a good reputation for chemistry which was what he was interested in at that time. However, through the potato club he had a chance to travel to Guelph and tour the Ontario Agricultural College. It was then that he decided that was where he wanted to go.

Having just turned 18, Clay started at the OAC in the fall of 1947. Being that it was just two years after the end of the war, the class consisted of approximately 50% return fellows – men who had spent up to 5 years overseas or in the service and the other 50% were 18-19 year olds right out of high school. It proved to be a unique learning experience.

1951 was a banner year. Clay graduated, married Dorothy Allan and even though there was a booming job market he was encouraged and decided to continue at Guelph and complete his Master's. His thesis was on, new at the time, a seemingly magic herbicide, 2-4-D. He was interested in how it affected how it was absorbed and moved in plants. Iowa State University offered him a chance to work on his doctorate and he accepted. With PhD. in hand, Clay had three job offers, one in New York State, one in Hawaii and the last in Guelph. Since he and his wife were expecting a baby, the thought of having their families close by made the Guelph job offer pretty compelling.

Starting as a plant physiology lecturer in 1955, Clay, by 1967 had achieved full professor status and in that year he was named Chair of the Botany Department. In 1970, he was named Associate Dean of OAC, primarily looking after research and in 1972 he became Dean of the Ontario Agricultural College, a position he held until 1983.

Through his excellence in teaching at OAC Clay positively impacted a huge number of students who are now leaders in Canada's modern agri-food industry. As a superb plant physiologist and weed scientist he worked closely with all in the industry, Clay Switzer kept efficiency and environmental concerns in perspective.

As Dean of the Ontario Agricultural College, he initiated a major review of the research programs and developed a curriculum with greater emphasis on broader issues including the environment, global agriculture and food and one that recognized agriculture as a business. He played a role in helping to develop a modification of the University of Guelph's strategic plan that resulted in a significant shift in its national and international reputation. He encouraged the transformation of the OAC into its present form; that of serving all of Ontario in addition to those directly involved in agricultural production.

As executive director of the Canadian Federation of Deans of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine, Dr. Switzer guided through to implementation, the idea of accreditation to provide a positive impact on maintaining high quality in agricultural education programs in Canada.

Immediately following his retirement from the post of Dean of OAC, Clay accepted the presidency of the Agricultural Institute of Canada, an umbrella group of various professional institutes and scientific societies working in the agricultural field. During his short time there he managed to address many of their internal concerns allowing the institute to move forward as a respected voice in agricultural policy.

In late 1983, Dr. Switzer accepted the position of Deputy Minister of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs under, then Minister, Dennis Timbrell, a position that continued under Agricultural Minister Jack Riddell. He retired from the ministry in 1989.

During his years as Deputy Minister, Clay led the way in policy formulation and implementation. He built consensus on numerous occasions where disparate views were being promoted by federal and provincial ministers alike. He improved relationships between governments and other stakeholders in agriculture. Clay Switzer helped attract an increasing share of the provincial budget to the agriculture industry. He was able to improve communications with the Ministry of the Environment to assist farmers to understand environmental degradation and to ensure that Ministry staff viewed environmental issues from an agricultural perspective.

In the now twenty years since his retirement, Clay has remained actively involved on many boards and committees within the agricultural community as well as his local community of Guelph.

Clay Switzer has served on 18 industry councils and major committees, earned at least 6 academic awards, 14 honours or life memberships in Institutes and Associations and been inducted into both the Canadian and Ontario Agricultural Halls of Fame.

Clay and his spouse Dorothy had three children; John, a musician who teaches at Seneca College, Karen , a statistician with Stats Canada and Robert , a professor at the American University in Cairo, Egypt.

Educator, visionary, leader and diplomat, he has served the industry of agriculture in several capacities using foresight, encouraging teamwork and managing resources with finesse. For over a half century, his genuine interest in people, loyalty and unselfish passion to our industry has contributed significantly to the advancement of agriculture. This afternoon, we take time to honour Clayton Macfie Switzer, 2009 inductee, Middlesex County Agricultural hall of Fame.