WISCONSIN MEAT INDUSTRY HALL OF FAME

1999

Robert F. Thayer
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"Bob" Thayer, the son of William and Rebecca Thayer, was born and raised on a farm near Whitewater, Wisconsin. He married Barbara Wright and they are the parents of Sandra (wife of Larry Stover), Donald (and wife Jamie), Sally (wife of Scott Plummer) and Rebecca (wife of Phillip Mohs), and the grandparents to 11 grandchildren. All four of the children are graduates of the University of Wisconsin and now several of the grand children are attending UW-Madison.

There is little doubt that Bob is certainly "Something Special from Wisconsin." Thayer's interest in the livestock industry began in his youth with 4-H and FFA livestock projects. He taught high school vocational agriculture from 1946 to 1953, first in Johnson Creek and then in Whitewater. His teaching record and excellent meat animal production programs caught the attention of Wisconsin Department of Agriculture administrators, and he was named livestock marketing specialist in 1953. He was promoted to head of the marketing section in 1957, and in 1964 was appointed administrator of the marketing division, a position he held until his retirement from the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) in 1985.

Thayer initiated the marketing logo "Something Special from Wisconsin" in 1983. While at DATCP, he served as secretary of the Wisconsin Livestock Breeders Association and coordinated the four Junior Livestock Shows for 10 years. During his leadership, the shows were expanded to include the market grading of each animal, carcass evaluation contests, and retail meat cut identification exhibits and contests.

He helped to develop an international agri-trade program for state departments of agriculture, and served on the steering committee for the development of the Mid-America International Agri-Trade Council. He also served on the Wisconsin Export Council, and as close liaison on international trade projects with the USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service.

Many of Thayer's contributions to Wisconsin's livestock industry went far beyond his job description. He managed several statewide livestock shows, and coordinated the Meat Animal Sale at the Wisconsin State Fair. He also coordinated tours for foreign visitors interested in buying Wisconsin agricultural products, and he held livestock seminars and set up hospitality seminars for international visitors at the World Dairy Exposition. Thayer spearheaded the organization of the World Food and Agricultural Foundation, Inc., which developed World Dairy Exposition.

Thayer joined Bob Bray, Ed Jones (both recipients of the Hall of Fame recognition in 1994 and 1997) and others to organize the Wisconsin Livestock and Meat Council. For many years, Bob served as the council’s advisor and representative from the DATCP. Through his leadership, the council has provided focus and direction for coordinating numerous activities (such as the Hall of Fame), and continues at present to play a successful role in Wisconsin’s animal agriculture progress.

Of special note in recognizing Robert Thayer for the 1999 Hall of Fame award is that he is the first person serving government to be so honored.