

Know Your Emeritus Members!

R. Bruce Tompkin



Current: Emeritus Member ('02)

Previous IFT Positions: Member-at-Large ('73), Chair-Elect ('76) and Chair, Food Microbiology Division ('77)

Member of IFT Committees: Annual Program ('75-'77), Certification of Food Microbiologists ('74-'76), Chair, HACCP Committee ('95-98), Federal Oversight and Regulation of Food Safety ('98), Expert Panel on Microbiological Food Safety ('01-'02), Develop a Risk Ranking Framework for FDA ('02-'05)

IFT Awards: Fellow ('89), Food Microbiology Division Lecturer ('96), Distinguished Service Award-Food Microbiology Division ('02)

Bruce is from Ohio where he earned a BS in Zoology from OU and an MS and PhD in microbiology from OSU. In 1964 he started as a research microbiologist at Swift & Company located in the Chicago Stock Yards. At that time Swift & Company was the largest food company in the US in dollar sales and employed 330 in research, 30 with PhDs. It was an excellent environment to absorb knowledge from the other researchers and gain experience with a wide variety of food and non-food products. In 1966 Bruce became Chief Microbiologist, a position previously held by Drs. John Silliker and then Dick Greenberg. Both were important mentors to Bruce in his early career.

An early responsibility was to manage a Natick R&D contract to determine the prevalence of *C. botulinum* spores in raw meat and poultry samples obtained from Swift plants throughout the US and Canada. Later research on *C. botulinum* during the nitrite controversy led Bruce and his colleagues, Lee Christiansen and Anna Shaparis, to investigate and publish a series of papers on the mechanism of nitrite as an anti-botulinal agent in meat and poultry products.

As others have experienced, especially during economic downturns, Bruce witnessed drastic changes as segments of the business were sold and numerous buyouts and reorganizations occurred. By 1988, technical staff had dropped to 27. Subsequent buyouts and mergers, however, again led to increases in R&D personnel. For this food scientist, *Listeria monocytogenes* became a major concern when the number of plants producing RTE meat and

poultry products increased from twelve to 28. Bruce's extensive experience in manufacturing plants; support from R&D, QA and a very capable group of microbiologists; and availability of a well-equipped laboratory--all contributed to effective management of spoilage problems and, more importantly, ensuring consumer protection through control of foodborne pathogens.



When first hired at Swift & Company, Bruce was encouraged by Dick Greenberg to publish and to actively participate in professional organizations, advice that Bruce took seriously. Over the years he became an advocate for sharing with others in industry, government and academia best practices in pathogen control.

He contributed more than 185 publications/presentations and thirty book chapters. Bruce was a member of the National Advisory Committee on Microbiological Criteria for Foods (NACMCF) for five terms and the International Commission on Microbiological Criteria for Foods (ICMSF) for twenty years, serving an additional seven years as an advisor. Bruce helped define the principles of HACCP through his activities on NACMCF and ICMSF. He also contributed to the concept of a food safety objective (FSO) and the role of microbiological testing in food safety management systems.

Bruce served as editor of the ICMSF book, Micro-organisms in Foods 7, which describes how modern concepts such as risk analysis, FSO's and microbiological testing can be used by governments and industry to enhance consumer protection. Bruce retired from ConAgra Refrigerated Foods in 2002 as VP, Product Safety but continues to promote food safety through committee work and by other means.