

Obituary

In memoriam Walter Pilnik



Walter Pilnik, former Member of the Editorial Board of *FOOD CHEMISTRY*, died January 19, 2007, in Wageningen, The Netherlands, at the age of 85. He was an internationally recognized authority on food science and technology.

Walter received his Ph.D. in Technical Sciences from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zürich in 1945. After working five years as chief chemist in the food industry, he became director of research at the Central Citrus Products Research Laboratory, Rehovot, Israel. He returned to Switzerland in 1955 as chief chemist, technical and managing director of Obipektin Ltd. in Bischofszell.

Walter joined the faculty at Wageningen Agricultural University in 1963, where he served as Professor of Food Science, and Head of Department of Food Chemistry and Microbiology. He retired as Professor Emeritus in 1988.

In his education programmes, Walter Pilnik favoured the disciplinary approach. He had a special gift of extracting, from the enormous volume of knowledge on food products, the key processes of a chemical, enzymological or microbiological nature. In this spirit, he familiarized his students with food products as complicated mixtures of compounds, which, depending on the conditions of storage and processing, may undergo various reactions affecting quality and nutritive value. His ideas about teaching food science have drawn worldwide attention, as judged from the endless flow of food scientists from abroad visiting with him for discussions on development of research and education in food science.

In his research activities, Walter has been an equally remarkable and gifted personality. He has been actively

pursuing research projects in a very broad field, often in close collaboration with colleagues at the university, with food research institutes in the Netherlands and abroad, and with food industry. He has been particularly successful in fruit and vegetable processing. His research efforts on structure–function relationships of pectic substances and other plant cell-wall polysaccharides have had a clear impact on fruit and vegetable technology. The unravelling of several mechanisms of cloud stability has greatly contributed to the quality of fruit juices. An even greater success was the introduction of the enzymic extraction processes for apple juice, which have been applied world-wide. They are also a model for studies into new enzymic processes, such as improvement of baking quality of cereals and brewing properties of malt. Undoubtedly the key to success in all these projects lies in the expertise that Walter's group built up in structure analysis of plant polysaccharides with enzymic and instrumental methods.

Walter's principle underlying all this research work is that it does not really matter what subject in food science one decides to work on, if only the job is done properly, which means that one has to work at the molecular level. However, the inspiration has to come from an interest in product and process development. Indeed, in most of Walter's research work, basic knowledge has been acquired, which has allowed food industry to make rapid technological progress.

Walter Pilnik leaves his dear wife, Rina, and he will be sorely missed. We lose a good friend, colleague and one of Europe's great food chemists.

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