

Nikita Paul Tarassuk, Food Science and Technology: Davis

1904-1981

Professor Emeritus

Nikita Paul ("Nick") Tarassuk was born in Kovel, Ukraine (Russia) on April 16, 1904, and he died March 17, 1981, at his retirement home in DeBilt, The Netherlands. If one is to be judged by the lives he touched and the impressions he made on others, then Nick's life was a full one indeed.

After an adventurous career in the White Army during the Russian Revolution, young Nick Tarassuk emigrated to the United States via Siberia and Shanghai in 1923. He worked in logging camps in Washington and as a seaman and fisherman in Alaska until 1927 when he became a student at the University of California, Berkeley and Davis. He was graduated from Davis with a bachelor's degree in dairy science in 1931. Nick completed the master's degree in the same field in 1933, and then went to the University of Minnesota where he earned his doctorate in agricultural biochemistry. In 1936 he returned to Davis as Instructor in the Department of Dairy Industry and Junior Dairy Chemist in the Agricultural Experiment Station. He progressed through the academic ranks to Professor and Dairy Chemist in 1954 and retired from the Department of Food Science and Technology in 1968. For 1958-59 Tarassuk was awarded a Fulbright Research Award at the Netherlands Dairy Research Institute. In 1966 he received a second Fulbright Award to guide development of research and to lecture in dairy and food chemistry at the University of Alexandria, United Arab Republic.

Dr. Tarassuk attained national and international recognition for his research and teaching in the field of dairy chemistry. In 1957 he received the Borden Award from the American Dairy Science Association for his contributions to this field. Over the years he was concerned with a wide variety of fundamental and practical studies of milk and milk products. He investigated the physical and chemical properties and uses of antioxidants, the keeping quality of milk powder, the browning reaction in milk systems, the colloidal properties of milk proteins, effects of heat and various salts on the aggregation of protein micelles, the causes of gelation and fat separation in evaporated milk, the practical control of rancid flavor in dairy products, and the determination of milk proteins by dye-binding. His research on the complex lipase systems in milk made important contributions to the development of a better understanding of bovine lipolytic enzymes.

As a representative of the University, he contributed effectively to the solution of numerous technical problems encountered by the growing and changing dairy and food industries of California. For many years he served as an expert judge of dairy products at the California State Fair, at county fairs and at Western Food Industry Conferences at Davis.

Professor Tarassuk lectured in the field of dairy chemistry and guided the research of many graduate students. Perhaps because of his own struggles as a youth and during the Great Depression, Nick had unusually good rapport with students, especially those from other countries. His infectious enthusiasm for research inspired students to undertake graduate work and his genuine concern for their welfare sustained them when they encountered academic or personal problems. Nick's quiet humor was combined with a forthright expression of views.

Dr. Tarassuk is survived by his wife, Riekja of DeBilt, two sons, Boris of Davis and Victor of the Los Angeles area, and several relatives in Russia.

Nick will be remembered as one of the pioneers of the Davis campus and as a man of many interests who shared his experience, wisdom and enthusiasm with students and colleagues.

L. M. Smith W. L. Dunkley E. L. Jack