

B.V. Rao - 'Father of Indian Poultry Industry'

Dr. Banda Vasudev Rao (B.V.Rao) was the architect of Indian poultry industry's growth and modernization that created world-class facilities in the country. Because of his significant and numerous contributions to the Indian poultry industry, in 1990, he received one of the highest honours conferred by the President of India, the "Padmashree" award.



Banda Vasudev Rao was born in 1935. A native of Hyderabad, India, he began his involvement with poultry farming in early '60s.

As a child, Rao loved being among the chickens that were part of his home in Chanchalguda near Hyderabad. He sat around watching them for hours, as they brooded over their eggs. He spent in frittering away college fees and years of chasing jobs, ranging from training for the railway police force to being a telephone operator and then personal secretary to a state minister and Rao suddenly found his vocation among birds. Rao found himself responding to an advertisement for a training program in dairy and poultry farming offered by the Rajendranagar Agricultural University. Rao applied and joined the batch of 2000 students.

As an entrepreneur his first challenge was from an American named Moore. Moore decided to test the young aspirant out. He gave him 500 birds and a challenged Rao if he could tend these birds satisfactorily. Rao was expected to head the project. Rao proved better than Moore's wildest expectations. Moore found his star pupil, and taught him everything he knew about poultry rearing. With the expertise he learnt from Moore, B.V. Rao wanted to start his own poultry farm but he did not have enough money. When Rao hesitated, Uttaradevi, his wife, went ahead and sold her jewellery and motivated her husband's friends to collect a capital for his venture and without the knowledge of her husband, she invested some of their hard earned and saved money in a seven acre plot. With in short period of time he succeeded in his business.

In 1971, Rao started Venkateshwara Hatcheries Ltd. near Pune with the help of a friend. Since then there has been no looking back. In just one year, the company, backed by the expertise that has been amassed over years in poultry farming, carved a special place for itself. It secured 70 % of the market share in the country. Nurtured and developed under the genius of Rao, Venkateshwara Hatcheries Ltd. went on to become one of the largest and most integrated poultry group in the world. Overcoming many disasters, he was able to establish a chain of hatcheries all over Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, M.P, Delhi and Bengal.

Yet, with the poultry industry still in a fledgling state, the immunization of the chicks was a major issue bugbear-vaccines were not only expensive but had to be imported as well. They were often unsatisfactory due to reasons like poor storage during transportation. There were a lot of formalities included in the lists of allowable imports. Hence, Rao tried to find a way of getting the vaccine legally. He lobbied with the government on behalf of the farmers and finally the vaccine was included in the list of allowable imports. He moved swiftly touring the vaccine institutes in the US for expertise and then convincing the government of the need for collaboration.

Finally he succeeded in establishing a vaccine plant. Production at the plant began in 1978 and later he established two more companies that manufacture vaccines to face any poultry disease: Ventri Biologicals (manufacturing Mareck's and Gumbro vaccines) and Sрни Biologicals. A training institute came next. Rao set up a 40,000 strong layer farm and a 5,000 per week broiler farm as the best available training ground for students who received hands-on training. He was also very successful in setting up of a mother lab, where all problems connected with all birds could be tackled.

The National Egg Coordination Committee (NECC), as it exists today, was the result of much hard work and foresight of Rao. The egg movement started when he met a few farmers who wanted to form a co-operative for egg marketing on the lines of Dr. Kurien's milk co-operative. A group of farmers motivated by Rao, travelled across the country, organizing over 300 meetings with groups, individuals, and traders. Their objective is to unite poultry farmers from all over India, and take control of their own destiny. Rao's call "My Egg, My Price, My Life" consequently brought farmers onto a united platform and realized this objective. Rao himself toured extensively to visit all farm areas across the country mobilizing the farmers to unite. Later NECC was formally registered under the Societies Registration Act. In line with its democratic principles, it was registered as a trust and from May 14th 1982 onwards NECC started deciding egg prices across the country.

Rao served as the President of WPSA (India Branch) from 1993 to 1996 and was selected as a distinguished poultry scientist of the International Poultry Hall of Fame that was given during WPSA (World's Poultry Science Association) council meeting in Istanbul, Turkey on 11 June 2004. Rao devoted his life towards the growth and modernization of Indian poultry production, transforming it from a backyard activity into a vibrant industry. Driven by science and technology, the poultry industry is one of the most powerful engines for growth of rural economy in India, supporting the livelihood of over 2.0 million people. His contribution to poultry science and world wide poultry industry, above and beyond the call of duty is an enough reason to put him as a role model for development workers across the country.

***Information till May-2009**