

In memoriam

Louis Blajan, DVM, 1924-2010

The dynamic veterinarian who brought the World Organisation for Animal Health
(*Office International des Épizooties*: OIE) into the modern age

Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur
Croix du Combattant volontaire 1939-1945
Officier du Mérite agricole
Officier de l'Ordre national de la Côte d'Ivoire



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Louis Blajan was born in Lahage (Haute-Garonne, France) on 10 April 1924 and passed away in Mont-de-Marsan on 10 February 2010.

After studying at the Pierre de Fermat Lycée in Toulouse, Louis graduated from the Toulouse Veterinary School in 1948. He received the *Institut d'élevage et de médecine vétérinaire des pays tropicaux* (IEMVT) diploma in 1949 and was posted in the French Overseas Territory of Mali from 1949 to 1952. Upon his return to France, Louis was appointed to the position of State Veterinarian in the Ministry of Agriculture from 1953 to 1968; there he was responsible for foot and mouth disease, swine fever and Newcastle disease. He also headed the consultative committee on infectious diseases. Subsequently, he was appointed Veterinary Inspector-in-Chief and Head of Border Controls Policy.

Louis married Janine in 1952. She was extremely supportive of him throughout his career. She died in an accident a month before Louis retired in 1990.

He was the technical director of Cofranimex (*Compagnie française pour l'importation et l'exportation des animaux reproducteurs et leur semence*) from 1968 to

1977 and Director of the *Association pour le développement des techniques de l'élevage français* (ADETEF) from 1977 to 1978.

Louis moved to the *Office International des Épizooties* (now known as the World Organisation for Animal Health or 'OIE') where he was Head of the Technical Department from 1978 to 1980. Two years later, he was elected to the most prestigious of positions for a veterinarian, Director General, in 1980. He was re-elected in 1985 and retired in 1990.

Louis succeeded in modernising the rather old-fashioned OIE and transformed it into a modern and efficient international organisation. He was instrumental in developing the *International zoo-sanitary code* (now the *Terrestrial animal health code*) and was the mastermind behind the *Manual of diagnostic tests and vaccines for terrestrial animals*, both of which are invaluable to the Organisation today.

In 1982, he created the *Scientific and technical review* which soon became a highly respected international veterinary journal. The fundamental procedures that Louis created in the ten years he occupied the position of Director General are still used today, especially in regard to disease reporting, drafting of final reports of meetings and conferences. Gifted with exceptional linguistic skills and writing style in French, Spanish and English, he could spend hours perfecting a text.

He was greatly respected and admired by the representatives of member countries. His knowledge of many different cultures and languages was comprehensive and extensive. He was conscious of the widening gap between developed and developing countries and was always supportive of and attentive to the concerns expressed by less economically privileged nations.

He ensured that the OIE staff received health cover and that regulations were drafted and a pension fund created for all members of staff. Despite his important and influential position, he remained modest and was always keen to listen to and share his good humour with colleagues at all levels. He valued his friendships and continued to correspond with and meet delegates and specialists of member countries during the twenty years after he left the OIE.

During his retirement, Louis was the driving force behind the book entitled *L'histoire des services vétérinaires français* (History of the French Veterinary Services)... a mammoth task.

Louis was a warm man, had a wonderful sense of humour and is remembered by many as 'a true gentleman'. One of his long-standing colleagues wrote 'As a veterinarian he provided leadership and direction, particularly when with OIE, and brought the organisation into the modern era. He was highly respected and admired by his peers throughout the world. He was a great man professionally and, more importantly, a terrific and supportive person, a very fine man'.

The *Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale dell'Abruzzo e del Molise 'G. Caporale'* has been privileged to benefit from the knowledge and experience that Louis provided in his capacity of Honorary Member of *Veterinaria Italiana*.

Louis is survived by his companion, Loulette, his two sons, Pierre and François, and his two granddaughters, Naïs and Philippine.