

# André Gerard van Veen

*March 13, 1903 — December 7, 1986*

André Gerard van Veen, Cornell's first professor of international nutrition, died in Ithaca on December 7, 1986, at the age of eighty-three. He was born in Medemblik, the Netherlands, and spent his early years in that country. He studied at the University of Utrecht, where he majored in plant physiology and biochemistry and obtained his master's degree (1926) and Ph.D. degree (1928), both cum laude.

In 1929 Dr. van Veen was selected to succeed Professor B. C. P. Jansen at the Eijkman Institute in Batavia, Netherlands East Indies (now Jakarta, Indonesia). He went there in 1930. Initially he worked on the purification of the B vitamin, thiamin, which Jansen had been the first to isolate. In 1935 he became chief of the institute's Biochemical Division. He was also deputy director of the Nutrition Research Institute, which he had helped to create in 1934. The Eijkman was a medical institute; its Biochemical Division included nutrition work, mostly of a laboratory nature. The Nutrition Research Institute was concerned mainly with fieldwork. Together the two institutes were well equipped to handle both practical nutrition problems and nutrition research. Prior to the Second World War the two institutes carried out about thirty-five food and nutrition surveys, mainly on Java and Sumatra. Those surveys included food consumption studies and clinical and biochemical studies, as well as agricultural and economic assessments. It was during those surveys that Dr. van Veen's interest and attention were first drawn to endemic outbreaks of poisoning that he discovered were due to natural food toxins. He studied several of these toxins in his laboratory. He found that the so-called bongkreng poisonings of Central Java were caused by a bacterium, *Pseudomonas cocovenenans*, that produced two toxins, tonoflavin and bongkreng acid. In localities where the poisoning occurred he found that it was associated with the eating of a fermented soybean cake containing pressed coconut.

In 1938 Dr. van Veen became professor of biochemistry in the medical school of what is now the University of Indonesia, and he was instrumental in establishing an agricultural faculty at that university. In 1936 he became secretary of the Indonesian Science Council and in 1940 president of the Royal Society of Natural Sciences. He was chairman of the Round Table Conference on Nutrition of the Far Eastern Association of Tropical Medicine held in Hanoi, Vietnam, in 1938.

From 1942 to 1946 Dr. van Veen was a prisoner of war during the Japanese occupation of Indonesia. During that time his knowledge of the nutritional properties of local plants helped to save the lives of many who were interned

with him, because he was able to demonstrate how they could be used to supplement the meager prison diet. Following the war he was awarded the Order of Officer of Orange—Nassau.

In 1948 Dr. van Veen returned to his native country to become professor of biochemistry at the Technical University in Delft. He returned to Indonesia on behalf of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in 1951, 1953, and 1969-70. The first two visits were concerned with helping to rehabilitate the Nutrition Research Institute and to draw up a national nutrition plan; in 1969-70 the purpose was to lay down the basis of a national food and nutrition policy in the five-year development plan of the country.

While on leave of absence from the Dutch government in 1947, Dr. van Veen helped to organize the newly created Nutrition Division of FAO, which at that time had its headquarters in Washington, D.C. The director of its Nutrition Division was the eminent nutritionist Dr. Wallace R. Aykroyd. That year Dr. van Veen was also instrumental in preparing *Rice and Rice Diets*, the first of FAO's Nutritional Studies Publications. He returned to FAO headquarters as a permanent staff member of the Nutrition Division in 1950; in 1951 FAO headquarters were moved to Rome, Italy. Dr. van Veen was initially senior supervisory officer of the Nutrition Division and later chief of its Food Science and Technology Branch. Significant undertakings included the initiation of work on food additives, which was done in close cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO) and which led, among other things, to the establishment of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, which today plays a very important role in many countries throughout the world in protecting consumers from health hazards in food. Also of significance was work on protein-rich foods for use in child-feeding programs in developing countries where surveys were revealing that protein malnutrition among young children was a very widespread and serious problem. That work was done in close cooperation with WHO and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund.

In 1952 he married Marjorie Scott in Rome, a Canadian who had joined the Nutrition Division of FAO in 1946. Their ensuing time in Rome together was both professionally productive and personally rewarding. Both grew to be very fond of Rome and of things Italian.

In 1962 Dr. van Veen was appointed professor of international nutrition in what was at that time the Graduate School of Nutrition at Cornell University. In the following six years he built up an impressive program focusing on problems of food and nutrition in developing countries. It evolved into the Program in International Nutrition, and he was its first director. Research work carried out at Cornell under his guidance included study of the nutritive value and wholesomeness of a number of fermented foods consumed in the Far East, Near East, and Latin

America. He was also Cornell's pioneer in the area of aflatoxin research. In collaboration with social scientists at Cornell he was the first to develop ways of applying social science research methods to the study of food and nutrition problems. He supervised field studies of graduate students in a number of countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. He worked closely with Professor Frank Young in rural sociology, Professor Kathleen Rhodes in community service education, and Professor Keith Steinkraus at the Geneva experiment station. He retired from Cornell in 1968. Since that time Cornell's Program in International Nutrition has expanded greatly and become the preeminent program of its kind in the United States if not in the world.

Dr. van Veen was a frequent consultant to the U.S. Interdepartmental Committee on Nutrition for National Defense (ICNND) in connection with national nutrition surveys, and he participated in the ICNND survey in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in 1964. In 1972-73 he served as a consultant to the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) in connection with vitamin A problems in developing countries and prepared one of three status reports published by AID in 1973. Dr. van Veen's publications throughout his varied career number more than 165. He was on the editorial advisory board of *Ecology of Food and Nutrition—an International Journal* and of the Dutch *Voeding*.

In 1970 Dr. van Veen received the Eijkman Award at a ceremony in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. The award is for scientists who have made significant contributions to tropical medicine and health in their broadest sense. The first recipient in 1927 was a nutritionist, Professor B. C. P. Jansen, for his work on thiamin. Dr. van Veen was the second nutritionist to have his work thus recognized. In 1983 he was elected a Fellow of the American Institute of Nutrition.

Dre, as he was fondly known by his friends and relatives, was a warm and understanding person, a humorous raconteur, and a good friend to many people, and he devoted much of his life to serving humanity. He will be greatly missed. He is survived by his wife, Marjorie; a son by his first wife; two grandchildren; and a sister.

*Daphne A. Roe, Diva Sanjur, Michael C. Latham*