



BENJAMIN ROGER

Roger Benjamin was born in New Zealand in 1930. In 1952 he received his BSc degree from Massey University in Palmerston North. He was active in a Zionist Youth Movement in New Zealand and emigrated to Israel in 1953.

After working for two years in the dairy and field crops of Kibbutz Ma'ale Hahamisha (in the Jerusalem Hills), Roger joined the Nahal Military unit of IDF – a unit combining settlement pioneering and military duty. During his service in this unit, he contributed to the development of the newly settled region Arava, by helping set up beef cattle and sheep herds in Kibbutz Yotvata north of Eilat.

He joined the Livestock Department of The Volcani Institute for Agricultural Research (later ARO) as experiment coordinator for small ruminants and cattle in the Negev Mountain area and the Arava desert regions. In 1961 he joined a small group of “young fanatics” who tried to develop a beef cattle herd at Neot Hakikar, an extremely hot marshy region south of the Dead Sea, with only saline water, some 300-350 meters below sea level. That experiment did not succeed (years later, however, a flourishing Moshav was settled there).

In 1965 Roger Benjamin began heading the ‘Migda’ experiment sub-station of the main ARO Gilat Experiment Station not far from Beer Sheva. The Migda site was established in 1962 by the Ministry of Agriculture to seek alternatives to field crop growing in this marginal region of the Northern Negev, hit often by severe droughts (the years 1960-1962 were severe drought years).

The late Prof. Naftali Tadmor (“Kofish”), Head of Pasture Division, and the late Prof. Ezra Eyal, Head of Small Ruminants’ Division of the ARO, initiated the first trials, and Roger was responsible for their execution. His research showed that combining rain-fed field crop farming with sheep grazing could be more profitable and sustainable than field crops alone.

During the years 1986-1990 Roger led a program for the development of an integrated system of field crops and grazing in Kibbutz Kramim in the Northern Negev, proving a definite advantage over just rain-fed field crops practiced in the region. At that time he was also active in establishing a demonstration farm for the nomadic Beduins near Lehavim in the North-

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Eastern Negev, aimed at suggesting a sheep and goat herd management regime which would not require seasonal herd migration.

An important chapter in Roger's work began during the 1970s. A series of international cooperation agreements between Migda and institutions involved in arid region research worldwide began, in which he filled a central role.

Together with the University of Wageningen in the Netherlands, during the years 1971-1981, growth processes of pasture and field crop plants, and various plant-livestock systems under arid conditions were studied. The experiments were summarized together with Dutch and Israeli colleagues in many scientific papers, making an important contribution.

In the years 1983-1990, within the framework of the Middle East Research Cooperation program (MERC) among US, Egypt and Israel, there was a major component devoted to the study of the role of pasture shrubs in animal nutrition in arid zones. Roger led the Israeli part of the research at Migda farm together with scientists from Ben Gurion University and the Faculty of Agriculture of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Benjamin initiated another international project with researchers from Germany and Kenya (1987-1995), which dealt with integrated systems of pasture, field crops and cattle in semi-arid zones. Yet another project financed by USAID (1993-1997) studied the nutrition of Karakul sheep in the Republic of Kazakhstan's desert areas.

Roger always demanded the maximum, of himself and of those who worked with him. In spite of his direct and crude mannerisms, he succeeded in developing fruitful and close cooperation with many scientists and students from both Israel and abroad. He believes that agricultural research must be practically oriented, and that one must do all in one's power to direct research toward grower's needs. This credence of his is reflected in his many scientific publications.

Roger was selected as exemplary worker in the Ministry of Agriculture in 1979. He retired in 1995, but continues working with colleagues from Ben Gurion University.