

Obituary

from the International Society for Animal Hygiene (ISAH) dedicated to
Professor Dr. Ir. Martin Tielen (1942–2026).

With deep sadness and great respect, we announce the passing of our honorary member, Professor Dr. Ir. Martin Tielen, one of the most outstanding and influential personalities in our society for many decades.

Martin Tielen was an internationally renowned scientist, inspiring academic, and highly recognized member of the international animal hygiene and veterinary community. His passing marks the loss of an exceptional personality whose scientific achievements, international leadership, and commitment to young researchers have left a lasting legacy.

For many of us, his passing means the loss of a mentor, a visionary leader, a dedicated supporter of the next generation and a dear friend.



Born on 22 September 1942 in Horst-Meterik, the Netherlands, Martin Tielen devoted his professional life to improving animal health, welfare, and sustainable livestock production. After graduating in Animal Science from Wageningen Agricultural University in 1969, he obtained his PhD in 1974 with pioneering research on the prevention of respiratory and liver disorders in fattening pigs. This early work laid the foundation for a distinguished scientific career spanning more than four decades.

As Professor of Animal Husbandry at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine of Utrecht University from 1985 to 2000, and through his longstanding work with the Dutch Animal Health Service, Martin Tielen made significant contributions to our understanding of animal health and behaviour, housing conditions, herd health management, disease prevention, and animal welfare. His main areas of scientific and professional interest included food and feed safety, veterinary epidemiology and the sustainability of animal production.

With more than 200 scientific publications, numerous books and book chapters, and lectures delivered in over 20 countries, he became an internationally recognized authority in this field. Yet his contribution went far beyond scientific publications. He possessed the rare ability to connect scientific knowledge with practical challenges, bringing together researchers, veterinarians, farmers, industry representatives, and policymakers in the shared pursuit of healthier animals and more responsible livestock production.

His leadership was equally remarkable. Martin Tielen served as President of the Dutch Feed Industry Association (NEVEDI) from 2000 to 2006 and of the European Feed Manufacturers' Federation (FEFAC) from 2004 to 2007. In these roles, he helped advance important discussions on feed safety, food quality, and sustainable agricultural production at both national and European levels.

One of his core interests was to promote and foster the principles of prevention of diseases and poor welfare in farm animal production. Therefore, he joined the International Society for Animal Hygiene (ISAH) already in the 1977, when he attended an ISAH Symposium in Kraków, Poland. For ISAH, Martin Tielen was much more than just a member. He developed over the years to one of the personalities who shaped the Society, strengthened its international character, and helped secure its future.

From that event in Kraków onward, the Society became an important part of his professional life. He served on its Executive Board for nearly two decades, including as President from 1997 to 2000. His outstanding organizational abilities were demonstrated at the highly successful 10th International Congress on Animal Hygiene in Maastricht in 2000. He also played a central role in modernizing ISAH's organizational structure and strengthening its international scientific cooperation. In recognition of his exceptional service, he was elected an Honorary Member of ISAH in 2011.

Perhaps his most enduring contribution, however, is reflected not in titles or publications, but in the opportunities, he created for others.

Through the establishment of the Professor Tielen Foundation (PTF), founded in connection with the Maastricht Congress in 2000, he helped open the doors of international science to young researchers from developing countries, which is still deeply anchored in the statutes of our Society. By providing financial support for participation in ISAH congresses, the Foundation has enabled many young scientists over decades to present their work in front of the scientific community, establish international contacts, and become part of the global ISAH family. By 2011, the Fund had already supported its 100th young researcher.

This initiative reflects something essential about Martin Tielen's personality and character: his conviction that scientific progress depends not only on knowledge and experience, but also on sharing opportunities, encouraging young talent, and building bridges across national, economic and political boundaries.

At this point, I would like to mention a personal example – among many – of his openness and his ability to bring people together. I first met Martin at the ISAH conference in Kraków, which had been organized by the late Prof. Janowsky. It was a time when the Iron Curtain was still very much iron and cold. Nevertheless, many academics from East and West came together, curious to listen to what the others had to present. Bridging these impenetrable political and academic walls of those days was one of the aims of ISAH, which organized its conferences alternately in Eastern and Western countries. That evening, we sat in the dining hall at separate tables, East and West Germans carefully kept apart. The East German scientists were not allowed to sit at our table – or perhaps they were afraid of STASI spies. Martin said, ‘We are all European scientists dedicated to hygiene,’ and invited everyone to his table for a cosy evening beer. No one could resist, not even the state-loyal GDR colleagues. It turned into a lively evening, during which many misunderstandings were dispelled. That was typical of Martin: he brought people together, sharing knowledge, understanding and a love of life.

Martin's achievements received numerous honours, including his appointment as a Knight of the Order of Orange-Nassau in 2009 and honorary academic recognition from the Wrocław University of Environmental and Life Sciences in Poland. These distinctions acknowledged both his scientific excellence and his exceptional service to the international academic community.

But beyond these formal achievements and publications, Martin Tielen will be remembered for his dedication to international cooperation, his commitment to scientific exchange, and his lasting support for younger generations. He created opportunities for those who follow. By that measure, Martin Tielen leaves an extraordinary inheritance.

His influence will continue in our Society through all the scientific and organizational contributions he made, and, above all, the many young researchers whose careers were enriched through his support.

Our sincere sympathy goes to his wife Mieke, his children and family friends, and all those who had the privilege of knowing and working with him.

The International Society for Animal Hygiene has lost a distinguished scientist, a dedicated leader, a valued colleague and a true friend.

We will remember Martin Tielen with deep gratitude and respect.

Martin, rest in peace - and angels may sing you to eternal rest.

Hannover, 22. October 2026

Jörg Hartung,

on behalf of the President and the Executive Board of ISAH:

Uwe Rösler, president (DEU), Andres Aland (EST), Herrmann Schobesberger (AUT), Sebastian Opalinski (POL), Jan Paeshuyse (BEL), Christelle Fablet (FRA)