Memorial Resolution of the Faculty of the University of Wisconsin-Madison
On the Death of Professor Emeritus Johnny W. Pendleton

Johnny Pendleton, professor emeritus of the Department of Agronomy, died on May 15, 2018 in Milwaukee at age 96. Dr. Pendleton was born on January 1, 1922 on a small “two-mule farm” near Hillsboro, Tennessee and went on to become a world-renowned agronomist. After graduating from high school, he enrolled at the University of Tennessee. When World War II began, he enlisted in the US Navy. He was commissioned a lieutenant and served as a naval aviator (pilot) in both the Atlantic and the Pacific theaters. He left active service in 1946 but served in the Naval Reserve until 1954.

After the war, he returned to the University of Tennessee and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in agriculture in 1948. Pendleton received a Master of Science degree in 1951 and his PhD in agronomy in 1955, both from the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign (UIUC). Upon graduation he accepted a faculty position with the UIUC Department of Agronomy, where his research focused on increasing corn and soybean yields in the U.S. His discoveries contributed to the global green revolution. In the 1960’s his research here and abroad played a key role in improving soybean production around the world, including on the Indian subcontinent, increasing protein availability to the poor.

In 1971, Pendleton joined the University of Wisconsin–Madison as chair of the Department of Agronomy. His research at the University of Wisconsin concentrated on crop production, crop physiology and ecological studies. His primary research emphasis was on corn and soybean production. He also studied the effects of snow mobile traffic on winter wheat, alfalfa, red clover and turf grass survival. As department chair, Pendleton was instrumental in the planning and development of the Plant Science building. He was a strong supporter of the undergraduate Agronomy Club and encouraged their participation in the student activities of the American Society of Agronomy. During his tenure as Chair of the Department, the number of undergraduate majors in Agronomy increased markedly. He created a forum for retired faculty and staff to meet to foster continued connections and interactions with each other and with the department; this group still meets regularly.

In 1979 Pendleton stepped down from the chair position and served a year with the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Washington, D.C. From 1980 to 1982 he served the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) as an agronomist and cropping systems program leader in the institute's Multiple Cropping Unit. During his time at IRRI, Dr. Pendleton worked on major rice-legume cropping system combinations and their fertilizer management. As part of a Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)-sponsored expert consultation held in New Delhi in February 1982, he urged that all fertilizer research on cropping systems must include a careful economic analysis. He stated that “farmers are not interested in more crops per year but in more profits from their land each year.” He was also the managing deputy director at the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture in Nigeria.

Dr. Pendleton’s life mission was to “feed the world” and his contributions to that effort were recognized by numerous awards and honors, including being named a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and a Fellow of the Crop Science Society of America. He served as president of the American Society of Agronomy as was also named Fellow of the Society. For his achievements in increasing rice production worldwide, South Korea awarded him the Korean Agriculture Medallion. He received a Lifetime Research Award from the American...
Soybean Association and the Northrup King Distinguished Scientist Award. In 1997, he was named Agronomist of the 1960’s by the Soil Science Society of America and in 2011 the UIUC College of Agriculture honored him with the “Award of Merit” for his contributions to agricultural research in the U.S., Asia and Africa. Leading agronomists and farmers the world over benefited from his research, and millions of people who otherwise would have known the pain of hunger did not, because of his work and ideas.

Johnny Pendleton had a life-long love of learning, and always emphasized the importance of education and hard work to all. In retirement Dr. Pendleton served on many global consultancies for agricultural projects in developing countries for the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Food and Agriculture Organization, and the International Fund for Agricultural Development, particularly in Asia and Africa.

He loved and served his country and had great faith in the ability of Americans and educated people the world over to address and solve the many challenges our world faces. He authored more than 100 technical papers during his career. He took great pride in the accomplishments of the 33 graduate students he sponsored from many countries. Supporting educational opportunity for future agronomists and ag leaders was an important issue for him, which is why he established a scholarship fund through the UIUC for students seeking to obtain advanced degrees in crop sciences.

Dr. Pendleton’s wife of 66 years, Eleanor, and their daughter Betsy Pendleton Wong, predeceased him. He is survived by children Don (Juliene), Pam Thickens (Bob), Kip (Anne) Sandie (Terese), son-in-law Kam Wong and 13 grandchildren and eight great grandchildren.

Memorial Committee
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