Memorial Resolution of the Faculty of the University of Wisconsin-Madison
On the Death of Professor Emeritus Richard R. Smith

Richard R. Smith died on June 2, 2018 at the age of 82. Dr. Smith became a UW faculty member in 1966 and retired at the end of 1999. His research program began in the USDA ARS Forage, Vegetable, and Oat Research Unit with a staff appointment in the Department of Agronomy, and he served as Research Leader of the Unit from 1979 to 1985. In 1986, he transferred to the USDA Dairy Forage Research Center where he served as Director from 1998 to 1999. His primary research activities involved the genetics and breeding of forage legumes. The results of his research led to the release of improved red clover cultivars, several of which had positive, widespread impact on agriculture in Wisconsin and the nation. Dr. Smith always believed that, while he enjoyed and excelled at agricultural research of all sorts, his research needed to be firmly directed to practical needs – an ethic anchored by his roots to his family’s farm.

Dr. Smith was born on August 7, 1936 in Mendota, IL and spent his younger years on his family farm. He graduated from Mendota High School in 1954 where he was the class president. He served in the Army for two years, stationed in Germany. Upon his return he married Shirley McConville in 1959 and moved to Champaign, IL where he obtained his B.S. degree and a M.S degree in Agronomy. He obtained his Ph.D. in Agronomy at Iowa State University.

Dr. Smith’s research at the UW provided basic information on the genetics of disease resistance, persistence, and nutritional quality of forage legume species in the Trifolium, Lotus, and Medicago genera. He was well-known internationally for his research excellence and the performance of the germplasm he created, particularly the release of two widely-used cultivars of red clover, Arlington (1973) and Marathon (1987). These cultivars captured about 50% of the seed market for the north central and eastern regions of the U.S. from 1973 to the late 1990s because of their disease resistance and persistence. Dr. Smith was a pioneer in red clover tissue culture research and released ‘NEWRC’ red clover germplasm that has high frequency plant regeneration potential from tissue culture. This germplasm has been used in multiple genetic transformation studies.

Dr. Smith authored or coauthored more than 200 publications, including ten book chapters. The Crop Science Society of American (CSSA) and the American Society of Agronomy (ASA) elected him Fellow in 1987. He was a member of both CSSA and ASA for 53 years. Dr. Smith served on the Board of Directors of CSSA, was Chairman of the CSSA Division C-1 (Crop Breeding, Genetics, and Cytology), and was Associate Editor for the journal Crop Science (CSSA) and the Agronomy Journal (ASA). He served on multiple program planning, nominations, review and task force committees for both organizations. He was a founding member and long-time participant in the Clover & Special Purpose Legume Crop Germplasm Committee of the National Plant Germplasm System (NPGS) and helped develop the descriptor list for clovers in the Germplasm Resources Information Network (GRIN) database. He took part in two Trifolium germplasm collection expeditions (Greece and Yugoslavia) that resulted in numerous plant introduction additions to the NPGS.

Dr. Smith was well organized and would gladly help arrange scientific meetings and related events on a worldwide scale. He attended most international Grassland Congresses and meetings of the European Grasslands Federation. He received the Merit Certificate from the American Forage and Grassland Council, the Wisconsin Agricultural Research Station Recognition Award for Outstanding Research, and the Researcher of the Year from the USDA ARS.
While having primarily a USDA ARS appointment, the Department of Agronomy and the UW Plant Breeding and Plant Genetics program benefitted greatly from Dr. Smith’s commitment to academic excellence. While he had no formal teaching appointment, he taught Biometry and Experimental Design courses in the Agronomy Department for several years, as well as the Forages course in the Farm and Industry Short Course program. He was a dedicated mentor to numerous graduate students as well as to junior faculty. He was known among students and faculty for his data analysis skills. Students and colleagues regularly sought him out for advice on experimental design and data analysis, which he gladly provided.

Dr. Smith was known for his strong work ethic, which he also demanded of his students and staff. But his sense of humor was always apparent along with the love of the outdoors, his family, and the joy of a good story. His was a life well spent.

Memorial Committee
James G. Coors
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