Science Societies

In Memoriam

November 29, 2023



Ronald L. Phillips

Ronald L. Phillips

CSSA and SSSA Fellow and former CSSA President Ronald L. Phillips died on Aug. 25, 2023. He was known as a loving and caring husband, father, mentor, and friend whose life's mission was to improve agricultural production and alleviate hunger. He was born in 1940 on a farm in Huntington County, Indiana. He earned his B.S. and M.S. degree from Purdue University and a Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota (UM), completing his postdoctoral training at Cornell University.

In 1967, Dr. Phillips joined the faculty of the Department of Agronomy and Plant Genetics at UM and was there 42 years, retiring at age 70 as a Regents Professor, first McKnight Presidential Chair in Genomics, and Director of the Center for Microbial and Plant Genomics. He has published more than 150 research papers, 70 chapters, 350 abstracts, and edited six books. Research areas have included the molecular genetics of crop species, cell and tissue culture, gene mapping, and genomics. He made significant improvements in protein quality, seed shattering resistance, and other important traits. He is on the “Wall of Discovery” at UM for the “first regeneration of complete corn plants from cells,” a groundbreaking discovery that led to the development of genetically engineered crops. He mentored 55 graduate students and more than 20 postdoctoral scientists.

Phillips was elected to the National Academy of Sciences in 1991. From 1996 to 1998, he was selected by Congress as USDA Chief Scientist. He also chaired the White House committee that wrote the Plant Genome Research Program requested by Congress. In 2007, Phillips was presented the Wolf Prize. He was elected AAAS Fellow as well as Chair of the Council of Scientific Presidents. He was a founding member and Director of the Plant Molecular Genetics Institute.

Phillips is survived by his loving wife of 61 years, Judy Phillips; his son Brett Phillips (Diane) and daughter Angela Phillips; and three grandchildren.

Burns R. Sabey



Burns R. Sabey

Burns R. Sabey, SSSA and ASA Fellow and 51 year member, passed away on June 28, 2023 in Morrison, CO at the age of 95. He was born on May 17, 1928, in Magrath, AB, Canada. He received his B.S. degree in Agronomy from Brigham Young University in 1953. He received an M.S. degree in Soil Science in 1953 and a Ph.D. in Soil Microbiology and Chemistry in 1958 from Iowa State University.

After graduation, Dr. Sabey joined the University of Illinois as an Assistant Professor of Soil Science. In 1969, he accepted a position at Colorado State University (CSU) as a Professor of Agronomy and spent the remainder of his career in Colorado. His special talent was undergraduate teaching and advising. He taught the Introductory Soils Course that grew in enrollment from 300 to about 700 per year. His courses were considered by the students and their advisers to be some of the most challenging and useful of any taught. As a recognition for his excellent teaching quality, he was selected to receive CSU's Shepherdson Award in 1973.

Sabey's research focused on nitrogen transformation in sewage sludge amended soils. He also investigated management of organic recycling systems in soils that resulted in optimum plant growth while minimizing potential pollution of groundwater, soils, and air. His significant research contributions have led to a more comprehensive understanding of the use of sewage sludge, sawmill residue, and animal manure as soil amendments. Sabey served as consultant for several large companies and institutions related to beneficial use of sewage sludge and other industrial by products as sources of plant nutrients.

Sabey played an important role in establishing the A Division as the education arm of the Societies. He was chairman of the division and ASA Board member representing the division. He also served as an *Agronomy Journal* technical editor.

He is survived by his wife, Elaine Bingham Sabey, of 74 years and leaves a legacy of love through his 6 children, 36 grandchildren, 65 great□grandchildren, and one great, great□grandchild.

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