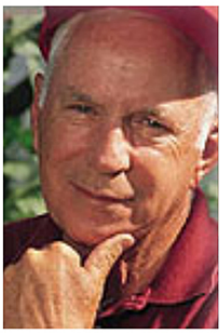
Science Societies

In memoriam: Earl Allen Wernsman

February 10, 2025

In Memoriam

Earl Allen Wernsman
1935–2025



Dr. Earl A. Wernsman, a member of ASA and CSSA for 45 years and a long-time member of the crop science and plant-breeding community, passed away peacefully

at his home on Jan. 16, 2025 at the age of 89. He was born Nov. 4, 1935 in Vernon, IL. He received B.S. and M.S. degrees in Agronomy and Plant Breeding from the University of Illinois in 1958 and 1960, respectively. He then attended Purdue University and was granted a Ph.D. in Plant Genetics in 1963. After brief postdoctoral study at Iowa State University, Dr. Wernsman accepted a position as an Assistant Professor of Crop Science at North Carolina State University in 1964. He was promoted to Associate Professor and Full Professor in 1968 and 1972, respectively. He retired from North Carolina State University in 2000 as a William Neal Reynolds Distinguished Professor.

For 20 years, Wernsman taught graduate courses in plant-breeding methods and theory and served as mentor for 10 M.S. and 15 Ph.D. students. He was widely recognized nationally and internationally for his research program on the breeding and genetics of tobacco and the genus *Nicotiana*. Research areas involved interspecific hybridization, quantitative genetics, genetic engineering, and doubled haploid breeding. His research program was responsible for the development of numerous commercial flue-cured and burley tobacco hybrids. At the time of his retirement, greater than 50% of the United States flue-cured acreage was planted to hybrids derived from his efforts. Several cultivars were also of very high international importance.

Wernsman's advice and counsel were widely sought by members of the international tobacco industry. He served as a consultant with numerous agencies in Chile, Brazil, Spain, and the Dominican Republic. He worked for 35 years as an adviser to agencies within the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture, and this work led to the development of numerous tobacco hybrids grown throughout the Mediterranean area today.

Wernsman was acknowledged for his professional contributions by being recognized as a Fellow of the CSSA (1986) and ASA (1987) and being awarded the Arthur E. Manzelli

Award (1990), the CORESTA Prize (1996), and the Lifetime Achievement Award by the Tobacco Science Research Conference (2007).

Wernsman was preceded in death by his spouse of 65 years, Doris Katherine Metzger, in October of 2024. He is survived by his daughter, Dana, and granddaughter, Neeva.

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