Journal of the American Pomological Society 63(1):24-25 2009

2008 Wilder Silver Medal to Dr. James J. Luby

The American Pomological Society (APS) awarded the 2008 Wilder Silver Medal to Dr. James "Jim" Luby, Professor, Department of Horticultural Science, University of Minnesota, in recognition of the outstanding contributions and impact the University of Minnesota Fruit Breeding program under his leadership has had on fruit breeding and the commercial fruit industry. The medal was presented at the annual APS meeting in Orlando, Florida in July, 2007. The Wilder Silver Medal was established in 1873 in honor of Marshall Pinckney Wilder, the founder and first President of the APS. The Wilder medal is presented to individuals or organizations that have rendered outstanding service to horticulture in the area of pomology.

Dr. Luby earned his B.S. in Agronomy at Purdue University in 1978 with highest distinction. Jim received his Ph.D. in 1982 from the University of Minnesota, majoring in plant breeding with statistics and plant physiology as supporting programs. Upon graduation, Dr. Luby accepted a position with the Department of Horticultural Science as an Assistant Professor with fruiting breeding research and teaching responsibilities. Dr. Luby was promoted quickly through the ranks becoming an Associate Professor in 1987 and Professor in 1994.

Dr. Luby took over the leadership of the University of Minnesota fruit breeding program in 1982. Since that time, he has published extensively on breeding and genetics (over 100 refereed publications) and is known internationally for his expertise on fruit breeding, germplasm collecting and evaluation, and quantitative and population genetics. While the University of Minnesota fruit breeding program has a long and prestigious history, Dr. Luby not only continued this successful program, he took it to an entirely new level of impact and recognition throughout the world for his development of cultivars adapted to cold climates. In his career at Minnesota, he and his team have released 22 cultivars (see list below), including 6 blueberry, 2 raspberry, 3 strawberry (3 patented), 4 winegrape (3 patented), 5 apple (4 patented), 1 plum and 1 pear. These cultivars have generated approximately $6,000,000 in royalties, licensing fees, etc., for the University of Minnesota. While nearly all of these cultivars have had an impact, a few deserved to be highlighted.

Apple cultivars

'Honeycrisp' has had the greatest impact of any of Dr. Luby's cultivars with over 4 million trees sold and plantings widely established in the U.S., eastern Canada, and more recently in Europe (primarily France and Germany), South Africa, New Zealand, Chile and Australia. 'Honeycrisp' is probably the most important cultivar from a U.S. breeding program since 'Jonagold' or 'Empire'. For the past decade it seems impossible to have read about new apple cultivars without a mention of 'Honeycrisp's incredible fruit quality and its mercurial rise to become one of the world's major new apple cultivars. More recently, Zestar!™ has sold well and is becoming more popular in the eastern and Midwestern U.S. as an early ripening cultivar.

Winegrape cultivars

At least 500,000 vines of Dr. Luby's new grape cultivars have been planted, remarkable considering how recently they have been released. These cultivars have helped spur the development of vineyards and wine production in cold climate regions of the Midwest and Northeast. The greatest acreage is in 'Frontenac', the oldest release, with more recent releases just beginning to be substantially planted. Wines of 'Frontenac' are now starting to win medals in regional, national, and international wine competitions, especially for port-style wines.

Blueberry cultivars

Dr. Luby's half-high blueberry cultivars have made small scale production possible in colder parts of the Midwest and eastern U.S. where it was previously not feasible. They have also been popular in very cold regions of Europe including Scandinavia. In addition, they are very popular landscape plants. A stunning 60,000-80,000 plants per year are being sold throughout the U.S.

Cultivars released by the University of Minnesota under Dr. Jim Luby's leadership

Apple: Honeycrisp (1991), Zestar!™ (Minnewashta) (1998), SnowSweet™ (Wildung) (2006), MN 1914 (Minneiska) (2006), MN 447 (2007)

Blueberry: Northblue (1983), Northsky (1983), Northcountry (1986), St. Cloud (1990), Polaris (1996), Chippewa (1996)

Wine Grape: Frontenac (1996), La Crescent (2002), Frontenac Gris (2003), Marquette (2006)

Strawberry: Winona™ (MNUS 210) (1997), Mesabi™ (MNUS 248) (1999), Itasca™ (MNUS 138) (2006)

Raspberry: Redwing (1987), Nordic (1988)

Plum: Alderman (1986)

Pear: Summercrisp (1987)

Dr. Luby's research impacts beyond cultivar development have been significant with over 100 publications and dozens of invited presentations throughout the world. He has sent a cadre of graduate students out who have had a major impact on horticulture, particularly plant breeding. He is known as a challenging and dynamic teacher for the graduate and undergraduate students he instructs. Dr. Luby is widely known as a fantastic sounding board for many colleagues as he can help them think through projects and scientific problems with practical and insightful ideas and comments. Finally, Dr. Luby has served in a coaching capacity for cross country ski teams in Minnesota where the teams and individuals he has worked with have had great success. The society is pleased to recognize Dr. Luby's many accomplishments.

-prepared by Chad Finn and D. Archbold

CALL FOR PAPERS – U.P. HEDRICK AWARD

A cash award of $300 with mounted certificate will be awarded to the winning student paper. Papers should be submitted to Dr. Esmaeil Fallahi, University of Idaho, Parma Research and Extension Center, 29603 U of I Lane, Parma ID 83660-6699 (e-mail: efallahi@uidaho.edu) by May 31, 2009. See the Journal for editorial style; paper length about 1000 words or 3-4 pages total. Papers can relate to any research aspect with fruit cultivars or rootstocks as influenced by environmental or cultural techniques. Breeding or the history or performance of new or old cultivars can be reviewed. Research and review papers will be judged separately.