

Dr. James F. Hancock

2011 Wilder Silver Medal Recipient

James. F. Hancock was born on January 20, 1950, in Cleveland, Ohio and he attended Louisville High School from 1964 to 1968. He received his B.S. in biology at Baldwin-Wallace College in Berea, OH, in 1972, his Master of Science degree in Botany at Miami University, in Oxford, OH, and his Ph.D. in Genetics at the University of California, Davis, in 1977 working under Royce S. Bringham. His thesis title was: "Ecogenetics of California species of *Fragaria*; habitats, morphology, enzymes and physiological tolerances of octoploids *F. chiloensis* and *F. virginiana*, and diploid *F. vesca*".

After his PhD, Dr. Hancock joined the faculty of the Biology Department at the University of South Carolina in 1977, and later moved to the Department of Horticulture at Michigan State University in 1979. At MSU, he was promoted to Associate Professor in 1984 and Professor in 1989. In 2002, he was appointed director of the Plant Breeding and Genetics Program, a post he held for 8 years, and in 2007, was named Director of the Plant Biotechnology Resource and Outreach Center at MSU.

Jim Hancock has distinguished himself as a researcher, plant breeder, author, teacher, advocate for international development, and mentor to graduate students and junior faculty throughout an outstanding career that exemplifies university scholarship and service to industry in all their aspects. Dr. Hancock's career is dedicated to advancing our fundamental understanding of the biology underpinning breeding, improving breeding capacities in the US and abroad, and increasing the appreciation of peers and students alike for the field of plant breeding. He is responsible for improving the visibility of the MSU Plant Breeding and Genetics program nationally and internationally, and

assuming a leadership role in the national and international effort to strengthen plant breeding worldwide. Most recently, he accepted leadership of, and developed a new vision for, MSU's Plant Transformation Center that resulted in it becoming the Plant Biotechnology Resource and Outreach Center. Through his leadership, PBROC now supports an internationally recognized outreach component for biotechnology and biosafety.

Dr. Hancock maintains a vibrant, productive, and highly recognized research program, and has done so for over 30 years. He utilizes a broad range of ecological, conventional genetic, molecular and genomic approaches to study polyploidy, and the origin and evolution of strawberries and blueberries, and is recognized as a world authority in the evolution and ecology of these crop species. Dr. Hancock has published more than 160 refereed scientific publications, 23 book chapters and 50 conference proceeding publications. He has authored the most definitive monograph on strawberry, and was lead editor and author of the most comprehensive review on breeding and genetics of fruit crops. His expertise in crop evolution also has led him to become involved in questions of gene flow and environmental safety of transgenic crops. He has been a respected contributor to the discussion of these issues at national and international levels as evidenced by invitations to participate in Pew Initiative and FAO panels disseminating information and developing policy on these topics.

Dr. Hancock's most enduring contribution to the grower community is his blueberry releases, although he maintains an active strawberry breeding program as well. He has developed some of the highest quality and most quickly adopted blueberry cultivars worldwide. These include: 'Aurora', 'Draper',

‘Liberty’ and, most recently, ‘Huron’ highbush blueberries. These varieties were developed to extend the season, but are also known for their exceptional taste quality. Their rapid global adoption has led to their being among the most successful patented plant varieties ever produced by MSU.

Dr. Hancock’s work and recognized expertise goes well beyond the university. Ever since Jim’s Fulbright Scholarship to Chile in 1993, he has actively maintained collaborative research and consulting activities with Chilean colleagues including a significant FONDEF grant in 2011. As a result, he is recognized for the instrumental role he played in the development of the blueberry industry in Chile and is known by most of the fruit marketers and exporters in that country for his recently released blueberry lines. Dr. Hancock has published numerous extension bulletins, popular articles, and he has provided many influential presentations at state, national, and international grower meetings. His contributions also include bringing national and international attention to the needs of plant breeding in the 21st Century by hosting an international workshop on the future of plant breeding education at MSU and participating in national efforts to establish funding mechanisms for plant breeding research and education. Jim also has been

involved in developing and delivering a series of WorldTAP International Short Courses on biotechnology and biosafety as they relate to modern breeding technologies. These short courses offered at MSU and abroad in South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda. Dr. Hancock currently plays an important role as a co-PI in a Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation grant supporting the African Biosafety Network of Expertise, which aids regulators in making decisions about the safety of GE crops.

Dr. Hancock has served as the major professor for 26 graduate students who have gone on to become scientists and educators and play leading roles as plant breeders, research scientists, and research directors for industry, USDA, private foundations, and international agencies and university professors, endowed chairs, and department chairs. He is frequently sought out as a graduate program committee member and has served on more than 100 MS and PhD graduate advisory committees.

In 1999, Jim was recognized with an Outstanding Graduate Educator Award from the American Society for Horticultural Science. Dr. Hancock’s honors also include Michigan State University Distinguished Faculty (2008) and Fellow of the American Society for Horticultural Science (2008).

Prepared by: Randolph M. Beaudry, MSU