Memorial to Dr. C. R. (Bob) Weber—July 18, 1914–August 12, 1980

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II. IN MEMORIAM

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Each of us leave our tracks in history and are remembered for our contributions to our profession. Certainly Bob Weber left big tracks during his years of service to the profession of plant breeding and genetics as a member of the USDA-ARS and as a member of the faculty of Iowa State University. Only those of us who knew him best knew the depth of feeling and commitment that he had for soybeans.

Bob Weber did not emerge all of a sudden as the dynamic individual whom I knew at Iowa State. Born in 1914 in Pana, Illinois and reared on a farm, his early life was characterized by hard work and the establishment of values that reflected the work ethic needed to survive the 1920s and 1930s. He did not move immediately into the academic life as is characteristic of most professionals today. He spent time as a farmer, commercial rose grower, and worked as a rural resettlement official for the USDA. He was 26 years old when he received his Bachelors degree from the University of Illinois, but then only a year later he received his Masters degree. Service in World War II interrupted his Ph.D. program. However, this did not deter his dedication and commitment, and he returned to Iowa State and received the Ph.D. in 1948. By the time he received his Ph.D. he had already begun to make his mark as a soybean breeder at Iowa State University.

Today, it is hard for us to visualize the role the scientist of Dr. Weber's era played in the improvement of our commodities. It is difficult for us to envision that soybeans, during Dr. Weber's early years, was a new crop -- a crop that had to be introduced and for which management techniques had to be learned. In essence, the plant breeder of that era had to be capable of dealing with the many facets of breeding, genetics, and crop production. In fact, at one time, Dr. Weber was classified as an Agronomist. It is also difficult for us to envision the stringency of research budgets after World War II, and the necessity for the researchers to do much of the work themselves, including
developing and maintaining the equipment. Those of us who knew Bob Weber can remember the many remnants of those early years that were retained because one of Bob's characteristics was never to throw anything away.

Only those who knew Bob well could know of his fiercely competitive spirit. His passion for excellence and to do better than the next individual permeated his whole life, whether it was breeding soybeans, hunting pheasants, or bowling. He was totally committed in everything he undertook. He firmly believed that nothing was worth doing if you were not willing to put the work, the sweat, into getting the job accomplished as it should be. The following quote was posted prominently above the graduate students' desks, and reflected Bob's philosophy. "The Father of success is Work. The Mother of success is Ambition. The eldest son is Common Sense. Some of the older boys are Perseverence, Honesty, Thoroughness, Foresight, Enthusiasm, Cooperation. The eldest daughter is Character. Some of the sisters are Cheerfulness, Loyalty, Courtesy, Care, Economy, Sincerity. The baby is Opportunity. Get acquainted with the old man and you will be able to get along pretty well with the rest of the family."

The outward appearance, the large hands, the big body, the swift and aggressive movement belied the sensitive person underneath. Again, only those who knew him best knew the sensitivity of this man. He was totally committed to soybeans, and he expected and often demanded a similar commitment from his graduate students and technicians. However, he quickly recognized when a student was unhappy or angry and took time to discuss the issue. In his own way he was concerned about people. But those of us who served as his graduate students can appreciate the support that he gave when the time came to write a thesis and to find a job. He truly had a sincere and intense desire to help the young make the transition from student to professional. His students have had and will continue to have an impact on soybean breeding and genetics and upon the growth of the industry in the world. So even though he is no longer with us, his work goes on.

There is no question in anyone's mind that Bob was an outstanding plant breeder, an authority and an expert on soybeans -- one of the best in the world. He had an in-depth and unique understanding of the genetic behavior of soybeans, and could see much more in a soybean plant than most any of us who worked with him. There is little question that Dr. C. R. Weber is one of the major reasons soybeans now occupy more than 8 million acres in Iowa. It was a
sad day for public research when Dr. Weber retired and took employment with private industry for his niche and role in life was in public research and in the training of students.

Any memorial to Dr. C. R. would be inappropriate without a brief comment about Peg, Ian, and Janie. A man as devoted as Bob was to his career had little time for family. But it was a joy to have an opportunity to have a glass of wine, a snack, or a meal at the Weber's home. Peggy was always a delightful hostess and the children were a joy to be around. They, too, were important to us who knew Bob best.

So the tracks are there and the direction is still clear for those of us who wish to make a contribution to agriculture. We need only to look at the dedication, devotion, and commitment to improvement that Bob had for soybeans and to try to follow them. Although we often remember straightening wires so that old tags could be reused, strings that were too short to use, and gathering stakes that seemed to be of no value, we realize that these habits came from a heritage of hard work, short budgets and long hours.