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USDA SCIENTIST WINS COTTON GENETICS AWARD

NEW ORLEANS (Special) -- Dr. William R. Meredith, Jr., cotton geneticist at the USDA-ARS Cotton Physiology and Genetics Research Unit in Stoneville, MS, is the recipient of the 1996 Cotton Genetics Award.

The announcement was made at the Cotton Improvement Conference during the National Cotton Council-sponsored Beltwide Cotton Conferences at the Marriott Hotel here.

The Cotton Genetics Award has been presented for the past 34 years by U.S. commercial cotton breeders to a scientist for outstanding basic research in cotton genetics. Criteria for the award are established by the Joint Cotton Breeding Policy Committee comprised of representatives from state experiment stations, USDA, private breeders and the Council.

In addition to his work at Stoneville, Dr. Meredith is the supervising research geneticist for a Unit of Plant Physiology at the Southern Regional Research Center in New Orleans. He is responsible for all administration, staffing, and budgeting actions at the two sites.

Dr. Meredith's work isn't limited to his involvement in programs in New Orleans and Stoneville. Some of his other activities include:

- * Responsibility for directing and coordinating the National Cotton Variety Tests which involved 13 states and 50 test sites.

- * Administrator for a cooperative research project on kenaf with Mississippi State University.

- * Location Coordinator for the Jamie Whitten Delta States Research Center at Stoneville.

- * Active cooperator with ARS and other non-ARS research Units involved in cotton research.

"Dr. Meredith is the top quantitative geneticist active in U.S. cotton research," said Dr. Laval M. Verhalen, Oklahoma State University agronomy professor who nominated Meredith for the award.

"I have long admired the quantity and quality of his work. In general, his research is multidisciplinary in approach and is characterized by its meticulous experimental design to find solutions for the major production problems in cotton. His research has made major contributions to host-plant resistance in cotton."

Dr. Meredith's reputation as a leader in cotton research -- particularly in quantitative genetics -- is evidenced by the many requests he receives to give presentations to international, national, ARS, state and private organizations. Since 1976, he has made about 50 invited presentations on this topic.

One of the most important aspects of his research through the years has been his contribution to host-plant resistance in cotton. In particular, his extensive work with the nectarless trait in both research and germplasm releases has gained attention in recent years -- since this trait offers considerable potential in reducing insect damage and thus the need for insecticides to control those pests.

His evaluations of cotton variety trial results over 13 states showed that breeding had increased yields across the U.S., but that commercial yields per acre were not increasing. The yield decline was identified, and the industry took corrective steps to improve yields per acre.

"I think the impact of his research and teaching on the cotton industry has been major," said F.X. Werber, National Program Leader, Fibers/Materials, USDA-ARS. "Just in the time that I have been with ARS, he has released several lines which directly resulted in improved quality, with improvement or at least no sacrifice in yield or production cost.

"I would go so far as to say that the improvement in properties of U.S. cotton -- principally the increase in strength of over 30 percent since 1985 -- is largely due to his work and his influence."

Dr. Meredith received his bachelor's and master's degrees in agronomy from Mississippi State University. He earned a doctorate degree in plant breeding from Cornell University. His undergraduate education at Mississippi State was interrupted by a two-year (1952-54) tour of duty in the U.S. Army.

Dr. David Stelly, professor of genetics at Texas A&M University, was the recipient of this award last year.

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