

January 10, 2020

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AUSTIN, Texas – Dr. Don Jones, Cotton Incorporated’s director of Agricultural Research – Breeding and Genetics in Cary, N.C., has been selected by the Joint Cotton Breeding Committee as the recipient of the 2019 Cotton Genetics Research Award.

The announcement was made here today during the 2020 Beltwide Cotton Improvement Conference, which convened as part of the National Cotton Council-coordinated 2020 Beltwide Cotton Conferences. Jones, who has devoted his 35+ professional years to plant breeding and genetics, received a plaque and a monetary award.

Since 2009, Jones has been instrumental in the development and collaborative release of more than 50 public germplasm lines resulting in six cultivars. Of those six, two have exceptional fiber quality – traits that are valued by the market and that help to maintain cotton’s competitiveness.

Jones led the development of a Universal Material Transfer Agreement that helped protect the intellectual property of public cotton breeders/institutions and later private seed companies who were willing to abide by the Agreement. He also spearheaded efforts to identify cotton fields with appropriate levels of Fusarium wilt race 4 (FOV4) infection and coordinated the first nationwide screen for resistance – an effort that identified 11 breeding lines with possible resistance to this upland cotton production disease threat.

Participation has increased by 40 percent in the biennial Cotton Breeders Tour since Jones began organizing the event which fosters communications/provides training for researchers. He assembled the public/private sector consortium that developed and oversees Cotton Incorporated funding support for CottonGen, the cotton community’s genomics, genetic and breeding database.

Jones also stepped up and established the current Cotton Winter Nursery in Costa Rica after it had to be moved from Mexico. Now in its

fourth season, the nursery provides expedited cotton breeding efforts by providing a tropical area to rejuvenate cotton genetic resources maintained in the national cotton germplasm collection.

One nominator, Dr. B. Todd Campbell, a USDA research geneticist, said Jones' interpersonal skills have resulted in numerous examples of building successful research teams that led to major impacts for the industry. He said one example involved Don's ability "to bring the best and brightest cotton genomics scientists together on a unified team to produce the first gold standard reference genome for the cotton industry. Since leading this collaborative effort, the cotton industry has seen an explosion of scientific advance using knowledge of the cotton genome."

The author of 74 peer-reviewed publications in the past decade, Jones received the 2017 Special Service Award from Texas A&M University and the 2019 Agronomic Industry Award from the American Society of Agronomy.

Jones earned his B.Sc. and M.Sc. in Agronomy from the University of Tennessee and his Ph.D. in Plant Breeding and Genetics from the University of Nebraska. Prior to joining Cotton Incorporated in 2003, he was a research scientist at Syngenta and then Monsanto.

The annual Cotton Genetics Research Award was established in 1961 by U.S. commercial cotton breeders to recognize and encourage basic research in cotton genetics, cytogenetics and breeding. It is administered by the Joint Cotton Breeding Committee consisting of representatives of the NCC, the USDA, state experiment stations, Cotton Incorporated and commercial breeders.