Reported Deaths

Ralph Harold Sharpe, a retired professor from the Univ. of Florida/IFAS, Horticultural Sciences Dept., died on 29 Mar. 2005, at the age of 91.

Sharpe was born near Tunkhannock, Pa., in 1948. He attended Pennsylvania State University and Harvard. He served as a U.S. Army captain during WWII. He moved to Gainesville in 1948. He was a horticulturist at the Univ. of Florida until retiring in 1975, and he continued his research in fruit breeding and variety development for an additional 23 years after retirement as a consultant to fruit growers. Sharpe pioneered the breeding of peaches and blueberries for the subtropical climates of the world. He is the father of low-chill breeding in these fruits and the resulting modern day varieties that dominate production in over 30 countries with current commercial production in subtropical climates.

He was the recipient of the ASHS Stark award in 1970 and the Wilder Medal by the American Phytopathological Society in 1978. He was awarded the Michigan Blueberry Growers Association's Pioneer Award in 2001, an award started by the Michigan Blueberry Growers Association to recognize individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the blueberry industry.

In 1948, Sharpe joined the Univ. of Florida to begin breeding blueberries. By 1967, he had produced and evaluated 150,000 seedlings. The first four Florida highbush cultivars released were 'Sharpblue', 'Floridablue', 'Avonblue', and 'Misty'. When Sharpe retired in 1975, he left a genetically broad based reservoir of southern highbush selections. Because many years are required to develop, test and commercially grow new blueberry varieties, it is likely the greatest benefits of Sharpe's work are yet to come.

Sharpe and his wife Alice established a Fruit Breeding Endowment at the Univ. of Florida in 1990.

He was preceded in death by his wife of 62 years, Alice. He is survived by three sons: Theodore Sharpe of Gainesville, Fla., Garey Sharpe of Flagler Beach, Fla., and Thomas Sharpe of Miami, Fla.

Wayne Sherman