

Reported Death

Emil Wolf

Last month University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) lost a giant, an unsung hero who carried his passion and his commitment to science into the lab every day until the day we lost him last month. Some of you have heard



me speak of the impact incredible contributions of retirees, engaged in a fully productive mode, have made in my career. Emil Wolf, IFAS plant breeder, was such a man. I regret that I did not meet him personally yet heard of him constantly! He was a gem of IFAS, and his commitment to us should be indelibly marked in our memories.

Emil Wolf, world-renown sweet corn and celery breeder at the Everglades Research and Education Center died 7 Sept. 2009. A native of Indiana, Professor Wolf received his education at Purdue University and joined the UF/IFAS faculty at Belle Glade in 1948. He formally retired in 1990 but remained active in the EREC sweet corn and celery breeding programs for a number of subsequent years. Professor Wolf revolutionized both the sweet corn and the celery industry.

Until the work of Emil Wolf, the sweet corn industry was based entirely on the use of the mutant *sugary-1* gene for enhanced sugar levels. Following an initial observation made by John Laughnan of the University of Illinois, Wolf replaced the mutant *sugary-1* gene with a mutant of the *shrunk-2* (*Sh2*) locus. This gave rise to a tripling of the kernel sugar content and much better retention of eating quality. While eating quality was enhanced, associated problems of seed and seedling vigor plagued the widespread use of the *sh2* corns. Despite these early problems and despite a mindset almost universally prevalent in the sweet corn industry that *sh2* would never work, Wolf persisted in his breeding efforts. He released two *sh2*-containing inbreds that gave rise to the vigorous hybrid 'Florida Staysweet', a hybrid that took over the sweet corn industry in the 1970s. While the parents of the first hybrid are now some 35 years old, it is clear that inbreds of

commercial use today contain a "heavy dose" of one of those parents.

Professor Wolf's efforts in celery improvement are equally impressive. Wolf realized early in his work that disease resistance for Florida's celery industry was essential. He began a selection program for Early Blight resistance in the 1940s and by the late 1980s material from the Wolf breeding program comprised greater than 90% of the Everglades celery production. Even though Wolf retired in 1990, the germplasm he produced 25 years ago remains the core genetics of Florida celery and a major contributor to California celery.

Wolf received a number of awards for his work. Perhaps most notable was recognition by both the Florida House and Senate, including House of Representative Resolution 1489 granted in 1987. Personally, Emil was quiet and unassuming, a true gentleman and a gentle man. His pioneering spirit, coupled with self-confidence and an uncanny ability to predict genetic potential were extraordinary. Emil was a professional, seemingly not bothered or consumed by trivial day-to-day issues. He was "old-school" in the best sense of the word. He was an integral part of the IFAS family for more than 40 years and his contributions continue to live on.

His legacy is now our legacy; his passion, a path forward for us to follow. His impact is a reflection of IFAS faculty's commitment to our clientele.

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