

## Presidential Biography

### John R. Clark

President of ASHS, 2008–2009

*University Professor, Department of Horticulture,  
University of Arkansas, Fayetteville*

An active ASHS Member since 1980, John R. Clark is currently a University Professor and program leader of the University of Arkansas small and stone fruit breeding program. Born and raised in Mississippi, he received his BS degree in 1978, and MS in 1980, from Mississippi State University, and his PhD from the University of Arkansas in 1983. Professional appointments, all at the University of Arkansas, include Research Assistant, 1980–1983; Resident Director, University of Arkansas Fruit Substation, 1983–1994; Associate Professor, 1991–2000 (relocation to campus, 1994); Interim Department Head, 1999–2000; Professor 2000–2007; University Professor 2008–present.

Currently, Clark is program leader of the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture small and stone fruit breeding program, which focuses on cultivar development of blackberry, grape, muscadine grape, blueberry, and peach/nectarine. Cultivars released or co-released total 36, including 27 that are patented. Clark's publications (senior or co-author) include seven book chapters; 106 refereed articles; 275 proceedings, trade, experiment station or other non-refereed articles; and 135 abstracts. His teaching includes courses in plant breeding and fruit production along with graduate and undergraduate advising. International travel has involved invited presentations in a number of countries at the International Society for Horticultural Science (ISHS) and other meetings worldwide.



He has participated in many activities at ASHS prior to serving as President and Chair of the Board including: Vice President, Research Division, 2005–2007; National Issues Task Force, Chair, 2006–2008; Associate Editor, *HortScience*, 1997–2000; William A. "Tex" Frazier Lecture Selection Committee 1999–2003, Chair 2003; ASHS Fruit Breeding Working Group, Chair, 1998, FRBR Fruit Cultivar Award Committee, Chair 1999; Co-Editor, New Fruit and Nut Cultivar List, ASHS and American Pomological Society, 2005–present; Registrar for Grapes for the Fruit and Nut List, 1993–2005; Co-Registrar for Blackberries for the Fruit and Nut List, 1998–present; Fruit Publication Award Committee, 2002, 2004; Awards Committee, 2008–present; Collegiate Activities Committee, 1996–99; Small Fruit and Viticulture Working Group Chair, 1990; Organizer of

the Symposium, "Intellectual Property Rights for Clonally Propagated Plants: Basics to Application," held at the ASHS Annual Conference, New Orleans, 2006; SR-ASHS: President, 2003; President-Elect, 2002; Nominations Committee, Chair, 2005; Membership Committee, 1994–99, Chair, 1994; Executive Committee, 2001–07, Chair 2007; Leadership and Administration Award Committee, 2004–07, Chair, 2007; Poster Section Chair, 1995, 2001; Fruit Science Section Chair, 1992, 1999; Blueberry and Small Fruit Workers, Secretary, 2001–2007.

Clark became a Fellow of ASHS in 2005; received the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture Spitze Land Grant University Faculty Award for Excellence, 2011; the Julian C. Miller Sr. Outstanding Researcher Award, Southern Region ASHS, 2007; University of Arkansas John W. White Division of Agriculture Outstanding Research Award, 2006; recognized by Arkansas General Assembly in House Concurrent Resolution 1027 for contributions to Arkansas of the University of Arkansas Fruit Breeding Program, 2005; Gamma Sigma Delta Research Award, Arkansas Chapter, 2004; Wilder Medal, American Pomological Society, 2003; John W. White University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture Outstanding Team Award, Grape Research Team, 2002; Functional Food Team, 2007; Outstanding Researcher Award, Arkansas Association of Cooperative Extension Specialists, 1995; Service Award, Arkansas State Horticultural Society, 1991.

---

## Appreciation, Inspiration, and Creativity in Horticulture: The Good Times Are Now!

ASHS 2009 Presidential Address: John R. Clark  
*St. Louis, MO, 27 July 2009*

It has been a true highlight of my professional career to serve as your ASHS President for 2008-2009. I remember attending ASHS meetings early in my career and being impressed with the leadership of the Society. I never envisioned being given an opportunity to take part in the leadership, but it has been a joy to serve. I thank all of you for this

opportunity, my professional colleagues in horticultural science.

I am sold on the concept of inspiration. The longer I live and learn, inspiration seems to be the divine force or energy behind dreams achieved—both big and small. I don't have to look far in my life to see true inspiration—that provided by my wife, Sharon.

Her example in being able to dream and envision shows me true creativity; her inspiration is a highlight of my life. I am supposed to be the horticulturist around our house, but without her creativity, our landscape would most likely be a collection of plants, not an inviting, living environment in which to thrive!

Possibly like you, at times I am somewhat stumped in being inspired. I can easily find myself mired in endless details of work, all self-created one way or the other mind you, and feel anything but creative. One area I try to concentrate on at that point, particularly when I really need to be creative, is to generate a good feeling about a topic or task. In working as a plant breeder (fruit breeding), and now having had a substantial amount of time to practice this profession, I often look back on how a new cultivar came about, and how good it ended up being (and not thinking about the ones that turned out to be true losers or dogs!). The good cultivars generate good feelings. I get to see them perform for growers in quality products and profits, hear people speak of the enjoyment of eating them, travel around the country and world telling stories about their merits and what is coming next, and even seeing royalties come in to support the continuation of the program I work in! The next thing I know I am dreaming of that next discovery, and the mechanics of getting that done, be it developing a crossing plan, walking miles of seedlings, working down to dark evaluating selections, and it all seems to be much easier. The job gets less trying, and I truly ready myself to find the next exciting discovery just around the bend or down the row. Before I know it, the opportunities are beyond what I can comprehend or at least manage. Living in spirit is what this is all about.

Another approach that works to generate a positive personal atmosphere is appreciation. If I appreciate something or somebody, I find that I am in a much better-feeling place. My strongest appreciation is directed toward others. I am surrounded professionally by a plethora of people to appreciate. They serve as inspirations to me. I want to highlight a few of these.

#### **Appreciation for Teachers**

I grew up on a dairy and row crop farm in Mississippi. Horticulture touched my life mainly by having a family vegetable garden that provided a substantial amount of food. Only after I grew up to some degree did I envision that there was something more than a food source to these plants. My first true exposure to the science of horticulture was as an undergraduate at Mississippi State University. Of course one of my first objectives was to find a way to get away from the dairy farm, but quickly I was taken by the knowledge shared by many of my first horticulture instructors. In my current job, I teach periodically, usually in odd springs. But I can say that I truly admire and appreciate the faculty in my department at the University of Arkansas who carry the load of undergraduate teaching. Two individuals I most admire are Curt Rom and Jon Lindstrom. Curt is a true academic. He flourishes in academia and loves the university environment, be it curriculum development, providing input to leaders on a range of education topics, or other academic duties. But, first and foremost, he is an excellent and committed teacher. He

gets the message across. He inspires. He is appreciated. Jon is a unique individual. I have observed that students consider him one of the most difficult instructors in our department or possibly college. Based on some of the howling I hear down the hall from my office where woody ornamentals students are viewing the array of stems and branches on display he has provided, I would expect them to not appreciate him. But the students love him! Why? He cares that they learn, he spends an inordinate amount of time teaching them, and they recognize that in his efforts. I don't have to take more than a few steps from my office to see the difference good teachers make. They provide all the appreciation I need for teachers whenever I take the time to notice.

I attended a Southern Region-ASHS meeting in 2009, and a fairly young faculty member named David Berle from the University of Georgia gave a presentation on expanding enrollment in horticulture classes. In an introductory horticulture class, he teaches about 650 students a semester (annual total over 1200). Can you imagine the impact he is having on these students, many who come into the class knowing little to nothing of horticulture and the science behind it? Most will not become practicing horticulturists by trade, but many will enhance their lives by the exposure to horticulture that David provides for them. Appreciation in numbers is going on with his efforts!

**I appreciate teachers who are laying the fundamental inspiration for tomorrow's horticultural scientists, users of technology, and our overall public.**

#### **Appreciation for Extension Specialists**

Teachers of a slightly different sort are those who excel in extension education. What a challenging job! Diverse clientele, organizational structure complexities, diversified knowledge requirements, all make this a unique group of teachers. And with current programmatic stresses and budget pressures, this group continues to share knowledge that is impacting lives, be it large producers, local master gardener groups, or a wide range of other clientele.

Bernadine Strik at Oregon State University is one of my most admired extension specialists. She has molded a great extension program, a fabulous research program, and also does classroom instruction. She is my "extension hero" for the job she does. I simply do not know how she covers all the ground she does.

Another outstanding person that I met in recent years is Jennifer Dennis at Purdue University. She—get this—has a joint extension appointment in horticulture and ag economics. When she told me of this, I had to hear the story of how she came up with this combination, which is rather scary to me. Jennifer is young, inspired, vibrant, and excited about all of horticulture and ASHS.

**The key point is I appreciate the efforts of extension personnel and the up front, real-life, out-there-with-the-people sharing of the technology and inspiration of horticulture.**

#### **Appreciation for Researchers**

Since my job is mostly research, I am more familiar with this area and relate to it more personally. The number of horticultural researchers I know and have interacted with is large, and there are so many examples of spectacular researchers that I simply do not know who to highlight in my simple wandering on the subject. But I do know that many of these accomplished scientists who I have had the honor to know have shown me what true discovery is. We all have our areas of expertise and excitement; mine is plant breeding. I truly never know what is "just around the corner" as a plant breeder. One never can fully predict what the genetic recombinants might be. But also, one cannot always fully know the application or use of a unique plant: that is where openness to creativity, use, other folks' inspiration comes into play.

**I appreciate the truly creative researchers in horticultural science who inspire us all to greater achievement in technology development.**

#### **Appreciation for the Horticultural Industries**

For much of my career, horticultural industries were somewhat a superficial area of involvement. What little technology I might produce, I was more inclined to just put it out there and see if the industry used it. Get the publication, give some presentations, list these on the annual review and resume, and move to the next study.

That has changed substantially for me in recent years for some reason. I am now more geared to learning what folks need, what they can use, how to match resources with users in the U.S. and some worldwide locations. This is a huge area of inspiration!!

In serving ASHS on its Board of Directors, I was given an opportunity to learn more about industry involvement in the Society. I particularly learned to appreciate Craig Campbell, with Valent BioSciences. Craig served as Industry Division Vice President and he opened my eyes on what value ASHS has to the industry, and how that might be addressed and increased. As usual, someone to open one's eyes is the easiest way to see a clearer path! He was key in my thinking and inspiration, which led to the Industry Involvement Task Force to envision ways to increase industry involvement in ASHS.

Another person I appreciate is Jim McFerson with the Washington Tree Fruit Research Commission. Jim was a leader in developing the Tree Fruit Technology Roadmap along with other industry leaders a few years back. As best I can tell, this idea was foundational to the idea of specialty crops and their working together to affect federal policy. His and others' work contributed greatly to the initiation of the Specialty Crops Research Initiative from which many of us have attained research funding. Vision such as Jim's is something to appreciate!

Horticultural Industries are the users of our technology development. For much of what we discover, its use by these industries

is really all that matters. **I appreciate the coalescence of our industries in supporting research, teaching, and extension in current policy in the United States.**

#### **Appreciation for Leaders**

A substantial portion of my early career was spent in management/administration. This experience gave me a clear focus of what I wanted to do for the remainder of my working years. I chose research in plant breeding rather than continuing in a management role. This experience provided me with a great appreciation for leadership in the form of department heads and others up the line of administration. I chose to do what I do, but I could not do this if someone else was not willing to lead. In most instances, these individuals largely give up their science or field of practice to deal with a range of leadership issues (and many of these being quite menial and repetitive if you look closely).

I have had some fine bosses in my career. One I admire most is David Hensley, who has been my department head for 10 years. He is encouraging, supportive, and takes actions to enhance what I do. He only intrudes on my time when it is truly necessary. I appreciate his approach, and could not achieve as much in my research without his leadership. My department head before that was Stephen Myers. He also provided vision and focus at an important time as a mid-career faculty member.

Another leader that I have come to admire is Tom Bewick with the Cooperative State Research and Extension Service (now NIFA). Some years back, Tom gave a talk at a professional meeting about the organizing of the many horticultural or “minor” crops into a single voice for so-called “specialty crops.” The idea was that this “alliance” would then affect federal policy for horticultural crops. I told Tom after the meeting that I appreciated his thoughts and ideas and thanked him for addressing the group. But privately I snickered to myself and said that what he was talking about would NEVER come about. But with his leadership plus that of many others, including a host of individual specialty crop leaders, the 2008 Farm Bill greatly expanded funding and other aspects of specialty crops in federal policy.

**Leaders with a vision make a difference, and are indispensable to all of us in nurturing the resources at hand. If they did not do the leading, who would?**

#### **Moving Forward**

Now turning the focus some, I have tried to learn over the years to slow down and check what wisdom might be in place to benefit my inspiration. The other day I sought some sources of wisdom of where we might have come from and where we might be inspired to take horticultural science in the future. I asked comments of Jim Moore, Jules Janick, and Fred Bliss.....

Jim shared this: “In the early days of ASHS, horticulturists were struggling for their identity. They were not considered on the same plane as agronomists working on the major agronomic crops. Now, that situa-

tion has changed. Horticulture is now recognized as a major contributor to food for the benefit of humankind! Never before has horticulture had more opportunities to contribute to the betterment of society and never before has society been as conscious of the health aspects of food and the quality of the environment.”

Jules Janick shared: “Inspiration in horticulture, wow. I suggest that the inspiring things in horticulture come about from the innovative development of simple things.”

Fred Bliss told me: “Two areas seem to me to have particular opportunities for horticulture: first, the contributions of fruits and vegetables to a balanced healthy diet that will impact people globally. We have to change the mindset of leaders that it is only calories that count toward food security. The second is the contributions of our horticultural plants to having a truly green landscape whether urban, suburban, or rural. The contributions to beauty and comfort of surroundings should be prime for our horticultural plants.”

“We need not discard tried and true practices, but rather be prepared to address problems and opportunities with the best possible mix of solutions that deal with broad issues rather than single, isolated topics.”

These three horticultural giants, plus some other recent developments in our society, provide clear evidence of what a grand time this is for horticulture, or our new designation, “specialty crops.”

Key items I see as important developments in the area of horticulture that reflect what a great time this is:

- expanded U.S federal government policy and profile of specialty crops research, promotion, and other support;
- our shifting urban population and a renewed awareness of where food comes from, providing horticulturists with a golden opportunity;
- local production, organics, sustainability, all in the public’s and OUR focus and strength area, along with a new energy of student interests in sustainability, organic production, and other directions;
- public horticulture interest and profile in our society is at an all-time high! It matters not even if you are in the middle of a big city—public horticulture is active and is our outreach to many.

With these points shared, I want to comment briefly on a few challenge areas for inspiration for us as horticultural scientists and ASHS members. I firmly believe that challenges are simply times for getting primed for the next good thing, the next opportunity to “see the light.” Although times are tougher economically, the time to get ready for the next big turn and how it can impact horticultural science is now. What better position to be in than one where our technology enhances food, environment, lifestyle, overall bringing forth the joy of life.

**Opportunity 1.** Let’s look closely at our users of the technology we produce, see what

they want, then work back to create the new, and enhance the existing. Work TOGETHER and COMPLEMENT each other as horticultural scientists. Support all fields of our profession. I promise that our efforts add up collectively to much more than each one individually. That is one thing I really like about the specialty crops initiative—it has created a storm of cooperative ideas manifested in unheard-of cooperation and ideas being researched.

**Opportunity 2.** Let’s keep our profile increasing in national policy for horticultural science. Our funding mechanisms are being enhanced, and with more use of our technology developments, increased funding should flow from industry and other sources. It is imperative to keep our profile in leadership areas such as in Washington, DC, to support the wide breadth of horticultural scientists with USDA-ARS, land-grant institutions, and others that are all part of this magnificent brain trust we have! The benefits of the Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) will be coming forth soon and the examples of good coming from that will feed into more positive funding. The snowball of success will get bigger and bigger!

**Opportunity 3.** Let’s keep the energy and inspiration of teaching horticultural science at a strong level, with those who have strength in this area persevering to be creative, innovative, and dynamic. Over time, our student numbers will fluctuate, but good times are always just around the corner—we just need to be in the right place around that corner when the “customers” of our expertise appear. More traditional ASHS members need to recognize that the inspiration of horticulture is not tied only to land-grant schools but the HOST of other programs that teach horticulture. Lets invite, recruit, and enfold all into ASHS from the range of colleges and universities across the country and around the world.

**Opportunity 4.** Let’s take care of our Society, ASHS. We have myriad options for meetings, publications, and other areas of professional society interaction. But there is nothing like ASHS. OUR ASHS. Our support in membership, attendance at annual conferences, publications in our journals, and other aspects of involvement are critical to our continued success. After serving on the Board and as president, I see some things I did not before. Each one of you in your contribution makes for a stronger Society—YOU make the difference in your energy and creativity, YOU inspire others. This is a professional home for the totality of horticultural science. Lets be very particular in our care and support of ASHS.

Folks, the final things I want to say come back around to appreciation. I appreciate the opportunity to serve as your president. It has inspired me to think, contemplate, and consider much more broadly about horticultural science, our wide interests, and our great potential. But most important, science and related areas aside, what I have most enjoyed is the interaction. And that is likely what I liked most about ASHS to start with, now that

I think back 30 or so years ago: being with friends, colleagues, and creating more relationships every year. Being on the Board and related groups in ASHS has been very exciting for me over the past five years. The

opportunity to hear fellow Board members express ideas, getting to “see” how they think, gaining in knowledge. Simply learning. I guess that is really what IT is all about. We are all learners.

As I often said at the end of my “Reflections” columns, and I say again here again: This is a grand time for horticulture and it truly is time to LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL!!!