



In Memoriam: Dr. Kenneth John Frey



Kenneth John Frey passed away on July 14, 2013, at Green Hills Retirement Community in Ames, IA. He was 90 years old. He will rest with his wife, Ann, in the Iowa State University Cemetery.

Ken was born in Kalomo, MI, on March 23, 1923. He attended Cogsdill, a one room country school, from grades one to eight. He went on to do his B.S. and M.S. degrees at Michigan State University, where he met his future wife, Ann Dunlap, to whom he was married for 68 years. He earned his Ph.D. in Agronomy at Iowa State College in 1948. After five years as a professor at Michigan State, he returned to Iowa State in 1953 and served on the faculty in the Department of Agronomy until his retirement in 1993. He remained active there until 2001, 56 years after starting at Iowa State as a graduate student.

Ken was recognized both nationally and internationally as a superb plant breeder, directing the Oat Breeding Project at Iowa State. Ken was very much a pioneer. He [championed the use of hill plots](#). He incorporated germplasm from crop wild relatives through broad-based populations and recurrent selection rather than back crossing, developing lines high in oil, protein, and beta glucan. He developed near-isogenic lines to make multilines resistant to crown rust, and [coined the term “linkage drag”](#), now commonly used. Ken was also a big part of the Quaker Oats Consortium, which focused on genomics. For his many contributions, Ken [received the “Distinguished Service to Oat Improvement” award in 1986](#).

Ken received many honours over the years. He was named George Curtis Distinguished Professor in 1970 and received the ISU Distinguished Alumni award. He was elected President



of both the Crop Science Society of America (1980 to 81) and the Agronomy Society for America (1983 to 84). He organized the first International Crop Science Congress to be held at Iowa State in 1989. In recognition of his contributions to agriculture and science, he received the Genetics and Plant Breeding Award from the National Council of Commercial Plant Breeders (1982), the Dekalb-Pfizer Crop Science Distinguished Career Award (1986), the Iowa Science Medal (1989), and the Henry Wallace Award for Distinguished Service to Agriculture (1990). In 2007, Iowa State University established the Kenneth Frey Endowed Chair in Agronomy. In the 1990s, after his official retirement, he authored the National Plant Breeding Study, which has become a blueprint for the development of plant breeding in the US. Internationally, Ken served as a consultant to major crop breeding institutes in India, Mexico, and the Philippines, the government of Malaysia, and the Agricultural University of Norway. He served as a Visiting Professor and Lecturer at universities in Sweden, Germany, Egypt, Yugoslavia, and Canada. In addition to his contributions to plant breeding research, Kenneth Frey was also known as an educator, serving as major advisor to over 100 MS and PhD students. He was influential in introducing and integrating women into the field of plant breeding. One of these women, Ann Mari Thro, [wrote about Ken's work for Plant Breeding Reviews](#) in 2010.



Ken leading a field tour with members of the Quaker Oats Consortium, Ames, IA, June, 1993.

(N.B.: Portions of this text have come from the [obituary published in the Des Moines Register](#) from July 17 to July 21, 2013)