

# Industry remembers wheat breeder Clarence 'Pete' Peterson

By MATTHEW WEAVER  
Capital Press

Industry members remember longtime Northwest wheat breeder Clarence Peterson for the way his research continues to impact farmers today.

Clarence James "Pete" Peterson Jr. died July 18 at age 93, according to his family.

Peterson began his career with the USDA-ARS in Pullman, Wash., in 1959 as a technician for groundbreaking wheat breeder Orville Vogel. With Vogel's encouragement, he took a leave of absence and completed his Ph.D. in 1970 at Oregon State University under the direction of Warren Kronstad, also a key figure in wheat breeding.

Peterson returned to Pullman and assumed Vogel's breeding program upon Vogel's retirement in 1972. The breeding position and program transitioned to Washington State University in 1988. He retired in 1994.

Vogel, Peterson and USDA ARS



Clarence Peterson

breeder for the USDA ARS.

Peterson had a major impact on the Pacific Northwest wheat industry through the release and wide-scale adoption of his winter wheat varieties, including Daws, Dusty, Hiller, Kmor, Lewjain, Luke and Rod.

His variety Eltan was the top variety in Washington state from 2001 to 2010 and has been grown on more than 8.5 million acres.

"Dr. Peterson's cultivars were widely grown when they were released and his crown achievement was Eltan," Garland-Campbell said. "He once said, 'You win some and lose some, and we won big with Eltan.'"

According to Garland-Campbell, legend has it that Eltan was almost discarded, likely because of weak straw, until they realized that it had excellent snow mold tolerance and the best winter survival of any soft white wheat.

"Because Eltan combined these two traits, Eltan is a parent or grandparent in most of the current releases from the WSU winter wheat program," she said. "Growers now are growing Otto, Devote and Curiosity, all descendants of Eltan."

With Peterson's passing and Allan's passing in March 2021, Garland-Campbell said, "we have now lost both members of a highly successful team of scientists who left a great legacy to current breeders and to PNW wheat growers."

"Dr. Peterson was an incredible breeder and person," said Glen Squires, CEO of the Washington Grain Commission. "I remember going to my first research review, and Dr. Peterson was describing

the breeding program and varieties. I just thought, 'Wow, this guy lives and breathes wheat varieties and breeding.'"

Peterson released 11 varieties during his tenure, Squires said.

"He continued a great legacy of breeding at WSU, and passed on that same legacy to subsequent breeders," Squires said.

Peterson's son, Jim Peterson, is one of those breeders, having been a wheat breeder at Oregon State University from 1998 to 2010. He also helped establish Limagrain Cereal Seeds as vice president of research before retiring in March 2021.

Jim Peterson and his siblings recalled their father being "up early and home late during field season, spending a lot of time outdoors, a lot of time on the roads and a lot of time at field days working with growers."

"Dad was not a scientist per se — he was really more of a wheat breeder, he liked working with the farmers, working on the farm with the growers, and that was where he

also had his biggest impact," Jim Peterson said. "It was always about working with the farmers in the state and doing what was in their best interest."

When Jim Peterson became a wheat breeder, his father would continue to quiz him about what was new and how it was developing.

"Wheat really did never leave his blood, he was always asking about it," Jim Peterson said. "At the end of the day, he had impact on the farm, and that's where he wanted it."

A graveside service and celebration of life for Clarence Peterson took place July 27 in Moscow, Idaho.

The family has asked that, in lieu of flowers, please direct donations or memorials to the Clarence and Jane Peterson Scholarship Endowment, established at the University of Idaho Foundation, 875 Perimeter Drive MS 3143, Moscow, Idaho, 83844-3143. Please indicate donations are in honor of Dr. Clarence Peterson.

## NCBA outlines farm bill priorities

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS  
Capital Press

RENO, Nev. — With its 2023 Farm Bill policy determined, National Cattlemen's Beef Association's focus now is making sure legislators are aware of its priorities.

"We try to come into these farm bills with very succinct asks, knowing that there's going to be a lot of other groups out there asking for a lot of different things," Allison Rivera, NCBA executive director of government affairs, said during the organization's summer business meeting here.

"Number one is going to be protecting those animal health provisions that we got into the last farm bill," she said, speaking from the meeting.

Those include a national animal vaccine bank that houses vaccines for foot-and-mouth disease. Foreign animal disease is a huge topic as countries like Indonesia now have an outbreak. So the need for this bank continues to be super important for the protection of the U.S. industry, she said.

"So we'll continue to look at bolstering that bank, as well as the state animal preparedness programs that have been very helpful and very effective ... and then our diagnostic labs, which do all of our testing and are



Sierra Dawn McClain/Capital Press

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just important for our three-legged stool that we fought for in the last farm bill," she said.

The second item is protecting voluntary conservation programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, as well as conservation easements, she said.

In addition to working for more flexibility in conservation programs, NCBA wants to make sure those programs remain in place, that producers have what they need, that NRCS agents are accessible on the ground and the voluntary component is maintained, she said.

"That's so important as we look at this broader conversation about the climate and conservation and sustainability," she said.

The third priority is strengthening risk-manage-

ment programs, which have seen a huge uptick in usage in the industry. Participation in programs like the Livestock Risk Protection program has more than doubled in the last two years, she said.

"So we're going to make sure that programs like that, that if tweaks need to be made that we work through this farm bill to make those tweaks and make sure that the programs like that have the funding they need to continue on," she said.

The same thing goes for disaster programs, as far as bolstering and tweaking programs. NCBA has been able to get some of those tweaks done in the last year or so outside a farm bill, she said.

"But in some instances, we've been told that they need to be done legislatively. And so this is our

opportunity to do that," she said.

Disaster programs, such as the Livestock Indemnity Program, have been hugely beneficial as cattle producers continue to deal with wild-fire, drought and extreme heat, she said.

"The last piece is we're just going to make sure that there's no livestock title," she said.

NCBA's concern is that a livestock title in the farm bill would open up the cattle industry to a wide range of new regulations, including market mandates.

"It's going to be a little bit of a heavy lift getting this farm bill done," she said.

NCBA will have to educate new members of Congress and members who have never voted on a farm bill on how important it is for agriculture and producers, she said.

## UC-Davis researchers find strawberry genes to fight Fusarium wilt

By SIERRA DAWN MCCLAIN  
Capital Press

Researchers at the University of California-Davis have discovered genes that make strawberry plants resistant to a deadly soil-borne disease called Fusarium wilt.

Their findings, recently published in the journal of Theoretical and Applied Genetics, are the culmination of several years of work. UC-Davis scientists genetically screened thousands of strawberry plants and developed DNA diagnostics to find and map wilt resistance genes.

Their discovery means breeders can now introduce the resistant genes into future strawberry varieties, giving plants genetic tools to combat the pathogen.

Fusarium wilt has long been a concern for growers in California, which produces 1.8 billion pounds of strawberries a year representing about 88% of strawberries harvested in the U.S.

The pathogen, according to the research paper, also affects other regions around the world and is considered by experts to be "one of the most destructive plant-pathogenic fungi worldwide." It causes wilting, collapse and death in susceptible plants.

"The disease has started to appear more often up and down the state (of California)," Glenn Cole, a breeder and field manager with the university's Strawberry Breeding Program, said in a statement. "Once the wilt gets in, the plant just crashes. You have total die-out."

According to the University of California's Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Fusarium wilt has become a bigger challenge for the state's strawberry industry since California phased out use of the fumigant methyl bromide in 2005. Without the fumi-

gant, instances of wilt have increased, especially in soil where farmers don't rotate crops.

Researchers say the newly discovered resistance genes can help prevent future strawberry varieties from succumbing to Fusarium wilt.

"What we've accomplished here is important ... and it's going to protect growers," Steve Knapp, director of the university's Strawberry Breeding Program, said in a statement.

This fall, according to the university, the program will release new strawberry cultivars that have the Fusarium wilt resistance gene.

Plant scientists have been breeding strawberries at UC-Davis since the 1930s and have already released more than 60 patented varieties through the breeding program.

In the future, the scientists say the DNA diagnostic tools they have developed will enable breeders to respond to any new Fusarium wilt variants that develop.

"There will be new threats, and we want to be prepared for them," said Knapp. "We want to understand how this works in strawberries so that as new threats emerge, we can address them as rapidly as possible."

The research on the Fusarium wilt resistance gene was conducted by Dominique Pincot, Mitchell Feldmann, Mishi Vachev, Marta Bjornson, Alan Rodriguez, Randi Famula and Gitta Coaker from the Department of Plant Sciences; Thomas Gordon from the Department of Plant Pathology; Michael Hardigan and Peter Henry, who are now at USDA; and Nicholas Cobo, who is at the University of La Frontera in Chile.

Funding came from UC-Davis and USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture Specialty Crop Initiative.

## Washington orchard fined, barred from H-2A program

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

An East Wenatchee, Wash., orchardist said he will get out of farming after being fined and barred from hiring H-2A workers for three years by the U.S. Department of Labor.

Gene Welton, who farmed 160 acres and whose parents started Welton Orchards and Storage in 1964, disputed Labor Department claims that he mistreated workers.

"I had a battle with them, and I'll tell you what, I was wrongly fined," Welton said. "I'm selling the business. I'm selling everything I got."

The Labor Department fined Welton \$64,120 and recovered \$7,485 in wages for 26 employees, according to a press release issued July 28.

According to the Labor Department, Welton violated housing standards, failed to provide work promised in contracts and subjected workers to verbal abuse and threats.

A department spokesman said in an email the investigation occurred between Feb. 15, 2020, and Nov. 15, 2021. No public documents about the allegations and investigation are publicly available, he said. No information was available Friday about how the fine was calculated.

The press release summarized violations:

- The housing violations included mattresses on the floor and failing to have

working smoke detectors.

- The orchard failed to pay workers for traveling to and from their home countries, offer hours in contracts and pay visa-related fees for several workers.

- The orchard failed to contact U.S. workers in its recruiting efforts and verbally abused H-2A workers and threatened to send them back to Mexico, according to the press release.

The department credited the Northwest Justice Project, a publicly funded legal aid program, with assisting with the investigation.

Welton said he tried to go by the book and couldn't afford a lawyer to represent

him during the investigation.

Welton attributed some of his troubles to workplace discipline that led to complaints and government authorities getting involved. "Write one person up, and the crew goes sour," he said.

Welton said one worker insisted on putting a mattress on the floor to keep from hitting his head on an upper bunk. Workers removed batteries from smoke detectors while they cooked meat, he said.

"To be honest, if I wanted to run a baby-sitting deal, I'd open one up," he said.

Welton Orchards violated provisions of the fed-

eral program that allows farmers to hire foreign seasonal workers, Wage and Hour Division District Director Thomas Silva in Seattle said in a statement.

"Their three-year debarment from the H-2A program demonstrates that the Department of Labor will safeguard U.S. jobs, prevent abuses by unscrupulous employers and protect vulnerable workers from working in substandard conditions," he said.

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**RSVP by August 15<sup>th</sup>**

- 8:30 a.m. Coffee & Refreshments
- 9:00 a.m. Meeting

*Must be a member to attend.*  
To join, see contact information below.  
Please RSVP by August 15<sup>th</sup>

**HAZELNUT GROWERS BARGAINING ASSOC.**  
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