

May 23-24, 2014

ITEM 163-2001-R0514

Authorization to Confer the Title of Professor Emeritus of Plant Breeding and Genetics upon Thomas Blake; Montana State University

THAT

Upon the occasion of the retirement of Dr. Thomas Blake from the faculty of Montana State University, the Board of Regents wishes to express its appreciation for his service to the University, the Montana University System and the people of the state of Montana.

EXPLANATION

Dr. Blake received his B.Sc. degree from the University of California, his M.S. degree from South Dakota State University, and his Ph.D degree from Washington State University. He served as postdoctoral student with Dr. Fred Bliss at the University of Wisconsin in 1983, and accepted the position of Assistant Professor of Plant Breeding and Genetics at Montana State University in 1984. He took a 2-year leave of absence in 2002 and 2003 to serve as Director, Germplasm Program at the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), housed near Aleppo, Syria. While with ICARDA, Dr. Blake managed research-for-development projects from Morocco through Afghanistan.

Dr. Blake was active in teaching at both undergraduate and graduate levels at MSU, teaching courses ranging from Introductory Biology (Bio 102) through Advanced Plant Genetics (PSPP 541). Dr. Blake was major advisor for 18 graduate students, nine receiving their M.S. degrees in plant genetics, while the rest received their Ph.D. degrees in plant genetics and plant breeding.

Dr. Blake's appointment varied over time, but averaged 80% research, 15% teaching and 5% service. His barley breeding and genetics project was very active, resulting in over 100 refereed publications in scientific journals, and was PI or co-PI on research grants that brought more than \$10,000,000 to Montana State University. Dr. Blake also developed and released several food, feed, hay and malting barley varieties. His variety 'Haxby' is the leading feed barley variety in Montana, and his variety 'Hockett' is the second leading malting barley variety in Montana.

Dr. Blake was called upon in 1999 to lead discussions about the impact of pending release of Roundup Ready wheat to Montana's wheat growers. Dr. Blake debated Monsanto representatives at several town hall meetings, and was extensively interviewed by Yellowstone Public Radio. Dr. Blake's primary argument focused on the economic impact of the use of GM wheat varieties. In late 1999, wheat grower associations across the US wheat production region voted to not support the use of GM wheat, and Monsanto decided to not pursue release of GM wheat varieties. This outcome permitted Montana wheat and barley producers to retain their markets in Asia, and with the US malting industry.

Dr. Blake held the organizing meeting of the North American Barley Genome Mapping Project (NABGMP) at the MSU Faculty Club in 1987. This project was funded by USDA from 1988 through 2010, and led to the currently funded Wheat-Barley Coordinated Activities Project.

Dr. Blake served the College of Agriculture, Montana State University and the wheat and barley producers of the State of Montana with innovation and distinction.

For these and many other contributions, the Board of Regents is pleased to confer the title of Professor Emeritus of Plant Genetics at Montana State University and wishes him well for many years to come.