

Morrill (Morrie) T. Vittum

May 4, 1919 – March 5, 2010

Dr. Morrill Vittum was born in Haverhill, Massachusetts and received a B.S. degree from the University of Massachusetts in 1939, a M.S. degree from the University of Connecticut in 1941 and a Ph.D. from Purdue University in 1944. Following a year in the U.S. Navy during W.W. II, in 1945 he moved to upstate New York and joined the Cornell University faculty. Dr. Vittum spent his career at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva. He spent 23 of his 37 years on the faculty there as the Head of Department of Seed and Vegetable Sciences. During those years he spent sabbatical leaves at the University of California, Oregon State University, and twice at USDA in Washington, D.C. He was also an international short-term consultant and advisor, and for short periods visited Turkey, Romania, and Yugoslavia.

In the early 1970s, he spent over two years at the University of the Philippines in Los Baños, south of Manila, coordinating cultural exchange programs (faculty and students) between that institution and Cornell University. In 1980 he was elected a Fellow of the American Society of Horticultural Science. For many years following his retirement, he served as Secretary and Treasurer of the New York State Seed Association, and was elected an honorary member of that organization in 2000. Dr. Vittum was recognized both nationally and internationally for his expertise in mineral nutrition of vegetable crops. His books Phosphorus Nutrition of Vegetable Crops and Sugar Beet (1980) and Band Application of Phosphatic Fertilizers in Vegetable Crops (1977) are frequently referenced today. In addition he published extensively on soil testing methodology and interpretation, and the interaction of plant nutrients.

Dr. Vittum was a pioneer in developing the technology on which the Growing Degree Day (GDD) method of determining the maturity of vegetable crops is based. This method of environmental monitoring is used extensively by vegetable processors to schedule planting and harvesting dates of green peas, snap beans and sweet corn.

Dr. Vittum and his wife, Winifred, were world travelers and visited or lived in 49 states and more than 20 countries. After retirement, they participated in many Elderhostels, visited their son, David and his family, living in the Philippines, and visited their daughter, Patricia, living in New Zealand. They always looked forward to returning to their home in Phelps, New York which hosted many guests, visiting scientists and students. The Vittum's valued their roots in New England returned annually for a quiet vacation on the lake listening for the loons.

Dr. Vittum loved the outdoors and nature. During college, he was President of the Outing Club, and he spearheaded efforts to rebuild many hiking trails in the Amherst, Massachusetts area following the Hurricane of 1938. He was an active Boy Scout all his life (an Eagle Scout with three palm branches) and was National Scout of the Year in 1935 (an honor bestowed by the VFW on one scout in the USA each year). He was scoutmaster of Troop 46 in Phelps for many years. He and his wife were both extremely active members of the Presbyterian church in Phelps (later to become the United Church of Phelps), with special interest in the Presbytery's Camp Whitman in Dresden, New York where for years he was a member of the property and endowment fund committees. The Vittum's were enthusiastic members of Foster Parents Plan and sponsored children around the world for more than four decades, and were instrumental in

moving the extended family of one of “their children” in the Philippines to the Rochester area. The Vittum’s were also host family for the first AFS student in Phelps.

Dr. Vittum is survived by his son, the Rev. David A. (Jean) of Phelps; son, Allan (Andrea) of Penfield; daughter, Dr. Patricia J. Vittum (Laurel Brocklesby), of Sunderland, Massachusetts; four grandchildren; and six great-grandchildren. Dr. Vittum leaves an incredible circle of friends around the world.

Hugh Price, Chairperson; Michael Dickson, Gary Harman