

Lester Carl Peterson

July 29, 1914 — August 24, 1970

Lester Carl Peterson was born July 29, 1914, in Quincy, Massachusetts, son of the late Carl W. and Ellen C. Johnson Peterson. He was educated in the Quincy school system and entered Massachusetts State College in 1932. His major subject was botany and he served as an assistant in the botany department from 1933 to 1936. Following receipt of his B.S. from Massachusetts State College he entered Cornell University as a graduate student in plant pathology in 1936. Professor Peterson completed the Ph.D. in 1942 and continued on the staff in the department of plant pathology, becoming instructor in 1944, assistant professor in 1947, associate professor in 1949, and professor in 1956.

During most of his professional career, Professor Peterson sought the improvement of potatoes through the development of varieties resistant to the major diseases of the potato plant in New York. His early work with Professor F. M. Blodgett on the control of late blight led to his association with Professor Donald Reddick's research on the transfer of the resistance from *S. demissum* to commercial potato varieties. Their research produced eight varieties carrying *S. demissum*'s simply inherited genes for resistance. The most significant aspect of this research program was the knowledge produced about races of the pathogen and their interactions with the genes for resistance from *S. demissum*. Upon the retirement of Professor Reddick, Professor Peterson took charge of this program. Soon after this the golden nematode was discovered on Long Island and Professor Peterson shifted the emphasis of this research to develop varieties resistant to this new pest. Working with nematologists in the department, a screening technique was developed and a source of resistance was identified. An alternative source of resistance was identified in England and because it was more simply inherited, it became the basis for Professor Peterson's breeding program. In 1956 this program was integrated with the one in the Plant Breeding Department and from the combined program came the variety Peconic, the first U.S. variety with golden nematode resistance, and a second variety soon to be released. In the past three years he had been devoting much of his time to the development of methods for identifying the potato spindle tuber virus.

Although Professor Peterson did not participate directly in the formal educational programs of the department, he was superb at teaching by example and on the job. All students in the department, especially the several whose graduate programs he directed and many others on whose committees he served, profited from his concern that graduate students and staff know the techniques and tools for production of high-yielding crops and how to use

effectively those tools and techniques. He enjoyed doing the field work himself and consequently knew potato growers, their problems, and their needs. He knew no variety could survive solely on disease resistance and, therefore, was also interested in potato improvement involving yield, quality, and commercial use.

In July 1939, Professor Peterson married Marie Evelyn Topping, who survives him. Also surviving are their four children, Mrs. Joanne M. Lucy, Mrs. Sally V. O'Connor, Mrs. Ellen A. Christopher, and Robert Karl; and one grandson. He will be remembered for his devotion to his family the amount of his time he gave to others, his determination, and his good humor.

R. L. Plaisted, A. F. Ross, G. C. Kent