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Contact: Linda McCandless
Office: 607-254-5137
E-mail: llm3@cornell.edu

Alumni couple's gift to fund a new professorship for Geneva offers recipe for success

By Bryce Hoffman

You may not know Yongkeun Joh, Cornell M.S. '78 in food science, but you have tasted his work.

His company, Advanced Food Systems, is a powerhouse in the burgeoning field of food ingredient technology - the science behind juicy precooked chicken breasts and packaged sauces that look and taste homemade.

"If you go to most fast-food restaurant chains or sit-down places, most of the products, especially the chicken and sauces and beef, have our products in them," says Joh.

Now, Joh and his wife and business partner, Sunny, M.S. '77, have endowed the Yongkeun Joh Professorship of Food Ingredient and Product Formulation. It is the first endowed chair to benefit the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station (NYSAES) in Geneva, and it may be the first professorship of its kind in the nation, says Chang Yong "Cy" Lee, chair of the Department of Food Science and Technology.

The new professorship will reflect the multidisciplinary, problem-solving approach that Joh credits for his success in business.

"Food science is applied science," says Joh. "It is chemistry, engineering, microbiology, marketing and management. There are multiple tasks, and they have to be properly applied to be successful."

Joh and Lee point out that ingredient scientists do not make finished foods. Instead, they work with the food industry to solve such problems as the mystery of how crispy breading on fried chicken goes soggy in the refrigerator overnight.

"You have to know how each ingredient behaves and how each ingredient interacts," Lee said. "Yongkeun felt deeply we should have this type of education that solves real-world problems. This position bridges that gap."

With its industry focus, the Joh Professorship will foster greater collaboration with industry and thereby promote economic development and add to Cornell's leadership in applied research, says Susan A. Henry, the Ronald P. Lynch Dean of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

"By addressing a recognized need of the food ingredient industry, the Joh Professorship will contribute significantly to the creation of profitable new business opportunities in New York and the Northeast," Henry said. "We are also thrilled by Yongkeun and Sunny Joh's generous commitment because it offers an important new model for funding applied research and extension at our Geneva experiment station, which now depends almost exclusively on the availability of public funding. We are committed to ensuring that the Geneva experiment station is able to continue to provide leadership in critical areas of applied research and extension outreach to the citizenry of New York, and the Johs' wonderful gift is an exciting and crucial step in this direction."

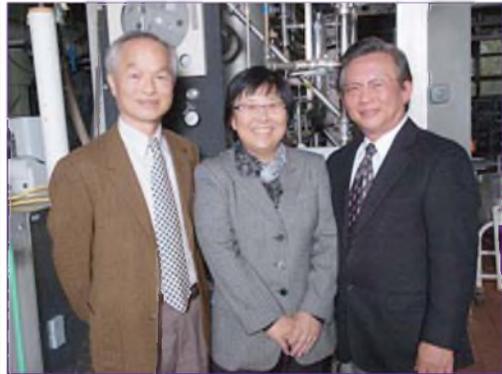
The professorship builds upon NYSAES's efforts to benefit New York's agricultural producers and food entrepreneurs and upon such unique programs and facilities as the Cornell Analytical Laboratories, Fruit and Vegetable Technology Pilot Plant, Food Processing and Development Laboratory and New York State Food Venture Center.

Yongkeun and Sunny Joh met and married as Cornell students and have supported scholarships and programs over the years, particularly for students from Korea. The professorship marks their most significant gift to date.

"Cornell is more than just an alma mater to us," Joh says. "We always thought we should give back."

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Pictures are linked to hi-res scans



Cy Lee (left) joins Sunny (center) and Yongkeun (right) Joh in Geneva food processing pilot plant after a reception that was held in their honor.
Credit: J. Ogradnick - NYSAES, Cornell University

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New York State Agricultural Experiment Station, 630 West North Street, Geneva, New York 14456
Telephone: 315.787.2011



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