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Susan Brown Honored with Cohn Professorship at Cornell

By Joe Ogradnick

GENEVA, NY: Susan K. Brown, a professor at Cornell University's New York State Agricultural Experiment Station (NYSAES) in Geneva, N.Y., has been named to the newly created Herman M. Cohn Professorship of Horticultural Sciences. The chair was endowed with proceeds from the sale of farmland in Sodus, N.Y. that Cohn, an apple grower, bequeathed to the university in 1966.

"I am delighted that we are able to honor Susan Brown with an endowed chair, something she very much deserves," said Susan A. Henry, the Ronald P. Lynch Dean of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALs). "Susan is an internationally recognized apple breeder and geneticist and a dedicated mentor to her graduate students."

The Cohn Professorship will help support Cornell's apple breeding program, one of the largest in the world. The program focuses on understanding and improving apple. Gene marker-assisted selection, fruit quality, nutrition and plant architecture are key areas of investigation, as is the study of the role genes play in tree architecture and development. Tree form modification would aid in mechanical harvesting, an important goal for the future because of increasingly scarce labor at harvest.

"Susan Brown is recognized as a world leader in apple breeding and genetics," said Tomas J. Burr, director of the NYSAES. "Her research on apple tree architecture and related genetic markers has the potential to greatly impact the apple industry worldwide."

"I was very surprised and quite honored to learn I was named the Cohn Professor," Brown said. "Like my predecessors at Cornell, I hope my research will have as positive an impact on current and future generations of apple growers as their work had on the Cohn family and their farm."

In "The Story of the Horn Farm," which Cohn wrote in 1954, he attributed much of the farm's productivity, profit and fruit quality to his association with the "Cornell men," to whom he was introduced by then CALs Dean William I. Myers. Among them were: Stan Warren in agricultural economics; Pete Hoffman and Karl Brase, in pomology; Bill Mills, Ken Parker and Jim Hamilton, in plant pathology; and Richard Wellington, in pomology- a man Cohn characterized as "the ace of fruit breeders."

Cohn, who came to fruit farming later in life, made his money in the clothing business in Rochester. In 1960, he leased the 300-acre Horn fruit farm on Lake Ontario in Sodus to Cornell for research, bequeathing the farm to Cornell in 1966 upon his death. In 1980, proceeds from the sale of various parcels of the property were used to establish the Herman Cohn Endowment Fund. The sale of the remaining acreage took place in 1992, and the fund has now grown to an amount sufficient to support a professorship.

The Cohn Professorship is the second endowed professorship established in as many months at the Geneva Experiment Station.

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