



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### Cornell Professor Emeritus Don Downing Remembered

By Elizabeth Keller

Donald L. Downing, professor emeritus of food processing at Cornell University's New York State Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva, N.Y., died Feb. 29 at age 76.

"Don Downing was an extraordinary person, faculty member and colleague who left his mark on the food industry and his colleagues at the Station through his infectious energy, his vision and a generosity of spirit," said Station director Tom Burr. "His giving and leadership to the community are also examples of a life lived to the fullest that inspires us all as we follow our own paths."

Born in Willoughby, Ohio, Downing grew up in Fulton, N.Y. He received his associate's degree in dairy science from the State University of New York at Morrisville. He then spent three years in the Army, including two years in Europe. Upon his return, he enrolled in the University of Georgia's food science and technology program. After receiving his B.S. and Ph.D., he and his family moved to Johnstown, N.Y., where he worked for Beechnut-Lifesavers for three years before joining the Cornell University faculty at the Geneva experiment station in 1967. He was promoted to full professor in 1980.

Downing's distinguished career at Cornell spanned more than 40 years. Although his position was 100% extension, he was always available to food science graduate students for advice on all aspects of the food industry. He was well known for encouraging them to attend symposia, conferences and meetings to complement their academic training and established the annual Downing Graduate Student Excellence Award. In addition, he was an invaluable mentor to junior faculty in the Department of Food Science and Technology in Geneva.

Downing's initial responsibilities at the Station were to assist the state's food processing industry and wineries. He organized or took part in over 150 food-related workshops and ran 22 annual offerings of the Better Process Control School, a training program required by the Food and Drug Administration for workers in canning operations. He had 152 publications to his name, including Processed Apple Products and the three-volume A Complete Course in Canning, both of which are industry standards. Moreover, Downing was one of the first Cornell faculty to work extensively with New York wineries. He was instrumental in creating the first Wine Industry Workshop in 1971 and helped start Cornell's enology extension program.

Downing created the New York State Food Venture Center (FVC) in 1988 in response to a growing need of the state food industry. He ran the program, an extension effort of the Department of Food Science and Technology, until his partial retirement in 1995. After retiring, he continued to work at the FVC part-time as the process authority, evaluating the safety of proposed recipes. His knowledge of federal and state food laws was inexhaustible, and he excelled in making obtuse regulations easy to understand.

Downing earned numerous honors and awards for his work, including a commendation from the N.Y. state commissioner of agriculture in 1997 and the USDA Group Honor Award for Excellence for the NECFE (Northeast Center for Food Entrepreneurship) program in 2004. As a Fellow of the Institute of Food Technologists (IFT), Downing served as chair of several national committees. He was councilor for western New York IFT for 21 years, helping to maintain the section's focus and financial health at a time when it was losing industry members due to transfers and plant closings.

"Don's death was totally unexpected and a huge shock to everyone," said Chang Y. (CY) Lee, professor of food science and chair of the Department of Food Science and Technology. "His contributions and dedication to the New York food and beverage industry are immeasurable. Above all, Don was a great person and friend. We will miss him greatly."

"I was privileged to follow Don as the second director of the center he created out of his commitment and desire to help food entrepreneurs and the New York food industry," said Dr. Olga Padilla-Zakour, professor of food science. "He showed me every day, with his unselfish, enthusiastic and professional disposition, how to be a Cornell extension leader and a caring mentor. He loved working with people, always providing meaningful assistance and encouragement. I am forever grateful for his advice, support and friendship. I will miss him very much."

Downing is survived by his wife of 49 years, Rochelle, his children, Kurt and Karla, and his granddaughter, Jacklyn. He also leaves behind four brothers and several nephews and nieces.

A memorial service will be held for Don Downing at the Geneva Country Club on April 12th, 2008 at 2:00 PM. The family has suggested



Don Downing in the Food Science and Technology Department's pilot plant with some of the products the Food Venture Center helped producers with.

memorial contributions to either Cornell University, for the Downing Graduate Student Excellence Award, or to Family Counseling Service of the Finger Lakes, Inc.

For the Downing Graduate Student Excellence Award, checks should be made out to Cornell University. Please indicate on the check or in a note that the gift is for the Downing Graduate Student Excellence Award and address the envelope to: Debby Ditzell, NYSAES, 630 W. North St., Geneva, NY 14456.

The address for Family Counseling Service of the Finger Lakes, Inc., is 671 South Exchange Street, Geneva, NY 14456.

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