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New Small Fruit Breeder Appointed at Cornell

by John Zakour

GENEVA, NY: Dr. Courtney Alyn Weber has joined Cornell University's Department of Horticultural Sciences at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva, NY, as an assistant professor. Weber is the new small fruit breeder, replacing John Sanford who has resigned to pursue other interests.



"It is wonderful that this program, which has a long history of productivity, will go forward

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without interruption, and that it will contribute to the efforts of the team of Cornell scientists working with the small fruit industry in New York," said department chair, Hugh Price. "Courtney brings to the position experience in conventional breeding integrated with the use of biotechnology."

Weber, who started work in March, considers himself a plant breeder first and a molecular biologist second. His short term plans are to familiarize himself with the ongoing program's raspberry and strawberry plant material and to make crosses that will allow him to study segregation at the molecular level of such traits as root rot resistance and fruit color. Because the principles of genetics and inheritance apply similarly to most plants, Weber foresees the transition from working on citrus to raspberries, strawberries, and other New York small fruits will go smoothly.

"I hope to release many improved raspberry and strawberry cultivars

for the Northeastern grower so the industry will expand," Weber stated. "The more initial success I have, the easier it will be to be more successful in the future. Success feeds upon itself." Unabashedly upbeat, he added, "My biggest challenge will be funding a molecular biology program in small fruits. It is notoriously hard to get outside funding for a minor crop, but I plan on doing so."

Weber received his B.S. in Agricultural Sciences in 1991 from the University of Illinois-Urbana, and his M.S. and Ph.D. in 1994 and 1998, respectively, in Horticultural Sciences from the University of Florida. While a student, he won the Hughes Memorial Scholarship, the A.S. Herlong Supplemental Fellowship, the ASHS Student Travel Grant, and the Plant Molecular and Cellular Biology Workshop Best Student Oral Presentation award.

While pursuing his Ph.D., Weber worked on the genetic mapping of quantitative trait loci for cold tolerance in citrus hybrids using various molecular markers and mapping strategies including bulked segregant analysis and interval mapping. Weber's master's thesis was "Peach Flower and Anther Characteristics and Genetic Relationships of Some Qualitative and Quantitative Traits." He also served as Plant Breeding Intern for Pan American Seeds, where he designed and initiated breeding programs for trial ornamentals.

NOTE TO EDITORS: Click on the above photo for a 300 ppi version. If you need a hard copy of the photo, please contact Rob Way at 315-787-2357, or at rfw2@cornell.edu

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