

## Nelson Shaulis, World Authority on Grapes, Dies

January 18th, 2000

CONTACT: Linda McCandless, [llm3@cornell.edu](mailto:llm3@cornell.edu), 315-787-2417

by Linda McCandless

GENEVA, NY: Nelson J. Shaulis, 86, professor emeritus of viticulture at Cornell University's New York State Agricultural Experiment Station, in Geneva, NY, died on Saturday, January 15, at Newark Hospital, in Newark, NY. "We have lost one of the truly great scientists of the world in the field of viticulture," stated James E. Hunter, director of the Experiment Station. "Even though Nelson retired in 1978, he continued his research and his writings and, above all, his great enthusiasm for New York's grape industry."

"Nelson Shaulis was one of the truly great minds in viticulture of the 20th century," said Hugh Price, chairman of the Department of Horticultural Sciences at the Experiment Station. "His research and writings have a profound influence on grape production in New York and around the world. He will be sorely missed by friends, colleagues and admirers and remembered every time one sees a vineyard trained to the Geneva Double Curtain system." Shaulis' career was primarily in research on the physiology of perennial fruit plants and peach trees at Penn State, and on grapes in New York, where the emphasis was on minerals and carbohydrate nutrition via soil and canopy management. His research in New York was primarily at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva, NY, and at Cornell's Vineyard Laboratory at Fredonia, NY.



Dr. Nelson J. Shaulis 1997  
departmental portrait Credit R. Way  
Date taken March 1997

Download High Res [tiff](#) or [jpg](#) photo



Dr. Nelson Shaulis discusses different  
grape varieties with Susan C. Fallon,  
the 1999 recipient of the Nelson J.  
Shaulis Advancement of Viticulture  
Award. Credit R. Way Date taken

Shaulis' research and extension efforts on grapes in the field of viticulture have had a profound effect on the industry in New York State and throughout the world. According to the Station's current viticulturist, Robert Pool, "Nelson's concepts have been applied in every major grape producing region of the world, and served as the knowledge base that allowed New World wine growing to emerge as a major factor in international trade in the last 20 years."

During his long and active research career, Shaulis developed two contributions that had a profound effect on the grape industry. The first was a training system for grapes called the [Geneva Double Curtain](#) (GDC). The system was initiated at the Geneva Station in 1960; field trials with growers began in 1964. Under this system, vines are trained to bilateral cordon wires located five to six feet above the vineyard floor, and the vines are short cane pruned. There is a four-foot division between the two top wires for each row of grapevines, and cordons are established along each wire. Vines in the row are alternated to the left or right cordon wires, which gives the celebrated double curtain effect. The system effectively doubles the cordon length per acre of vineyard and is used to train vines of certain vigorous varieties of grapes used for processing.

Advantages of the GDC system are many. It increases leaf exposure to sunlight, which results in better fruit and vine maturation, and increases yield, sometimes by as much as 90 percent. Vineyards managed in this way are better adapted for mechanical harvesting. The GDC is documented in Bulletin 811, dated July 1967, which is still one of the Experiment Station's most frequently requested bulletins.

A second major contribution was Shaulis' work with cooperators from Cornell's Department of Agricultural Engineering that resulted in the development of the mechanical grape harvester. Today, harvesters patterned after this design are used to harvest virtually all the commercial grapes grown in New York and many other locales.

Shaulis also conducted important research on factors to consider in siting vineyards, grapevine physiology, vineyard mechanization and management,

June 1999

Download High Res [tiff](#) or [jpg](#) photo



Dr. Nelson Shaulis inspecting grapes in a vineyard at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station. Credit NYSAES

Download High Res [tiff](#) or [jpg](#) photo



James H. Brahm III presents Peter Hemstad with the second annual Nelson J. Shaulis Advancement of Viticulture Award. Looking on is Dr. Nelson J. Shaulis after whom the award is named. Credit:nysaes

Download High Res [tiff](#) or [jpg](#) photo

mineral nutrition, rootstocks, and canopy microclimates. He was an expert in defining attributes of site, growth, canopy, and crop in vineyard management. He also pioneered the current interest in canopy management by documenting the negative impact of interior leaf shading and by providing new ways of measuring and expressing canopy density.

Because of his vast knowledge and intense research techniques, Shaulis was frequently called upon to assist or advise others throughout the world. In 1962, he spent the fall studying grape culture in France, Switzerland, Germany, and associated areas. In 1967-68, he was the Fulbright Senior Research Fellow in Australia, where he conducted viticultural research.

Shaulis' long and distinguished career began at Penn State, where he graduated with a B.S. in horticulture in 1935, and a M.S. in agronomy in 1937. He received his Ph.D. in Soils from Cornell University in 1941. He served as a Soil Conservationist with the USDA Soil Conservation Service from 1938-44, while he was also an instructor and, later, assistant professor in pomology at Penn State. In 1944, he was appointed assistant professor of pomology at Cornell at the Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva, and professor of pomology and viticulture, from 1948-67. He retired as professor of viticulture, emeritus, in 1978, and remained very active in the field. He was a treasured sight on the Geneva campus as he walked to his office from his home almost every afternoon as recently as two years ago.

In 1972, in recognition of his outstanding research on grapes, Shaulis was named a Fellow of the American Society of Horticultural Science, the most prestigious award of that organization. In 1997, 19 years after he retired from the Station, this distinguished scientist was the recipient of the Merit Award given by the American Society for Enology and Viticulture, also the highest award of that society. He was also the recipient of Merit Awards of the Society of Wine Educators, the American Wine Society, the New York State Wine and Grape Foundation, and the National Grape Cooperative, and received the award for Outstanding Achievement from the Eastern Section-ASEV.

Shaulis was a member of the American Society of Horticultural Science, the American Society of Agronomy, the Soil Science Society of America, and the American Society of Enology and Viticulture of which he was made an honorary member.

In addition to his extraordinarily active career in research and extension, Shaulis served on the Board of Education for the Geneva City School District in the 1960s,

and was a member of the Zion Lutheran Church from 1944 until his death.

Shaulis is survived by two daughters, Catherine Santomartino of Scotia and Margaret Harty of Sodus; three grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren. He was predeceased by his wife of 55 years, Lillian on July 30, 1996.

A memorial service will be held on Friday, January 21, at 10 a.m., at the Zion Lutheran Church, 18 Snell Road in Geneva. The Reverend Dan Hoffman will officiate. Funeral arrangements are being handled by the Devaney-Bennett Funeral Home

In lieu of flowers, friends may make contributions to the Nelson J. Shaulis Fund for the Advancement of Viticulture, c/o Mr. John Murphy, Cornell University Foundation, 102 Prospect Street, Ithaca, NY 14850, or to the Zion Lutheran Church Mission Endowment Fund, 18 Snell Road, Geneva, NY 14456.

[NYSAES](#) | [Publications](#) | [Latest Press Releases](#)

Contact Webmaster: [webmaster@nysaes.cornell.edu](mailto:webmaster@nysaes.cornell.edu)