

Robert F. Becker

August 9, 1931 — July 23, 1996

Robert Becker died July 23, 1996, after a tragic and sudden accident. Bob died doing what he truly enjoyed, helping other people. He was painting the roof of the First United Methodist Church in Rushville, New York, when he slipped and fell onto the cement sidewalk 12 feet below.

Bob was born in New Jersey on August 9, 1931. He received his undergraduate degree from the University of New Hampshire in Horticulture in 1954 and his Master's degree in Botany from the same university in 1956. He worked towards a Ph.D. degree in Horticulture at the University of Missouri, and then spent two years in the military, reaching the rank of Captain.

In 1959, he joined the Cornell community as an Assistant County Agricultural Agent in Ontario County. In 1960, he was appointed Regional County Extension Specialist, and in 1970, Extension Specialist, located at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station. The rapport he developed with growers and processors was well appreciated and he was named the Extension Specialist for processing vegetables for the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. He held that position from 1970-86. But Bob was much more than an advisor on vegetable production. He was an advisor to many Cornell administrators on the direction the university should take in regard to vegetable and extension programming. He was respected and admired by the vegetable farmers of New York, and also by his peers around the nation. He was in widespread demand as a speaker at vegetable production meetings across the nation. In 1986, he was promoted to Associate Professor in the Department of Horticultural Sciences. Bob retired in 1992.

Bob developed and promoted the NYS Processing Vegetable Conference which later became the NYS Vegetable Conference, one of the major such conferences in the country. In 1980, Bob initiated the commodity advisory committees for sweet corn, snap beans, cabbage and tomatoes. It was a result of Bob's influence that growers and processors began to contribute research funds to the university through these commodity research committees. The cumulative value of these contributions to vegetable crop research at Cornell is in excess of \$1,000,000.

Bob's list of friends was many, not only within the Cornell community, but also throughout the entire nation. The awards given to him by the many organizations with which he was connected evidence this. He received a special award for 33 years of service from the New York State Cabbage Research Association in 1992, the Outstanding

Leadership Award from the New York State Vegetable Conference Planning Committee in 1992, and the Extension Division award of Excellence from the American Society for Horticultural Science in 1989.

Even in retirement, Bob devoted considerable time to the Experiment Station. He continued to serve as a resource person and provided support for the vegetable extension field staff and, during the season, would often be seen with them in different counties as they worked with growers and processors. He also helped the Experiment Station's vegetable variety evaluation programs on snap beans, sweet corn, and cabbage. He participated actively in the planning process for the NYS Vegetable Conference, and continued to participate in some of the commodity advisory committee meetings.

Bob had many interests beyond vegetable crops research and extension. He was a specialist on the history of vegetable production and varieties grown in the U.S. He advised many of the vegetable garden projects at historic centers around the country, such as Williamsburg and Sturbridge Village. He was on the advisory board of the Genesee Country Museum and active in developing its historic vegetable garden, including growing seed of some of the old outdated vegetables. During the centennial year for the Experiment Station, he was in charge of designing and planting a Heritage Garden. This garden had examples of varieties of vegetables grown for 100 years previously and compared them to the kinds of vegetables grown today.

Bob was also a great wood worker and specialized in carving shore birds. He and his wife, Fay, scoured the countryside for rare decoys and had a large collection at home. He was very active in his local church, the United Methodist Church in Rushville, New York, and was chairman of the church board.

Some of the professional organizations to which Bob belonged included the New York State Association of County Agricultural Agents where he had been secretary and vice president, the National Association of County Agents, the American Society for Horticultural Science, the Association of Living Historic Farms and Agricultural Museums, and the Empire State Soil Fertility Association.

His wife, Fay, and three children, Nancy, Dale, and Sheryl, survive him. He was very fond of his six grandchildren, and enjoyed making most of their Christmas presents. Bob will be remembered as a leader, a scholar, a mentor, and a lifelong friend by all whom knew him well.

Helene Dillard, Michael Dickson, Hugh Price