Henry M. Munger

May 10, 1916 – August 25, 2010

Henry M. Munger, Professor Emeritus of Vegetable Crops and Plant Breeding died in Ithaca, New Yo k at age 94. He was raised on the family farm near Byron, New York where he was educated in a one-room school, graduated from South Byron High School and entered Cornell University at the age of 16. He received the B.S. degree from Cornell in 1936, the M.S. degree from Ohio State University in 1937 and the Ph.D. degree from Cornell in 1941.

Thanks to his intelligence, his keen powers of observation and deduction, his tireless engagement, his commitment to his students, and the pleasure he took in his work, he established himself as one of the world's most eminent vegetable breeders. Through a career that spanned more than 60 years, almost all at Cornell University, he released more than 70 vegetable varieties and breeding lines in nine different vegetable crops. He was especially famed for his almost incredible success with the backcross breeding method, and for his work on disease resistance. But he also pioneered improved nutritional characteristics, appearance, flavor and yield. Henry was also a strong ad ocate for the potential of vegetables to enhance nutrition and health throughout the world and for improving the eating quality and consumer acceptance of vegetables. During is career, he advanced a number of key concepts in advocating for an increase role for vegetables in the diets of the poor, especially in tropical environments.

An especially significant teaching experience was the long-standing partnership he shared with Royse Murphy teaching Methods of Plant Breeding. That partnership lasted decades and is memorialized now with the Munger - Murphy award, presented each year to an outstanding graduate student in the Department of Plant Breeding. Henry was also a mentor to 60 graduate students having advised 18 M.S. and 42 Ph.D. candidates. In recognition of his teaching, Henry received awards in 1983 and 1998 from the American Society for Horticultural Science. In addition to his contributions in teaching and research, Henry served as Head of the Department of Vegetable Crops from 1951 to 1966. His professional colleagues recognized him nationally by naming him editor of the Proceedings of the American Society for Horticultural Science from

1950 to 956 and of the Vegetable Improvement Newsletter from 1959 to 1982. He was elected President of the American Society for Horticultural Science from 1966 to 1967.

As a public plant breeder, Henry always facilitated interaction with breeders in the private sector. In recognition of his contributions to vegetable breeding and collaboration with the vegetable seed industry, Dr. Munger was awarded the World Seed Prize in Belgium in 1994. His colleagues estimate that 95% of slicing cucumbers in North America trace back to his work bringing improvements including disease and insect resistance, non-bitter flavor, uniform color, dwarf habit and female lines. To recognize his many accomplishments including mild onions and long-keeping tomatoes, Henry Munger was the first living person to receive the honor of being elected to the Hall of Fame of the American Society for Horticultural Science in recognition of his outstanding contributions to the science, profession, and industry of horticulture. In this honor, he joins other horticultural luminaries previously elected posthumously including Liberty Hyde Bailey, Luther Burbank, and Gregor Mendel.

With his keen eye for observation of plant type and flowering habit, Henry identified a petaloid male sterile Queen Anne's Lace plant while vacationing on Cape Cod. Wild Queen Anne's Lace can be crossed with cultivated carrot, so he tagged the plant, returned to collect seed and made crosses to cultivated carrots. Through work with several of his graduate students Dr. Munger directed studies that have revolutionized carrot breeding. Carrots are now almost exclusively sold as F1 hybrids produced using this system because of the gains in crop quality and uniformity that allowed a new product, baby carrots. This development resulted in significant increases in total US consumption of carrots. As a consequence of Dr. Munger's work, we now see snack packs of baby carrots included in millions of school lunches instead of chips or less nutritious foods.

Internationally, Dr. Munger served in consultancies in Ecuador, Egypt and India. He was a Visiting Professor in the College of Agriculture, University of the Philippines in 1969-70. He delivered the keynote address for the inauguration of the Asian Vegetable Research and Development Center in Taiwan in 1973 and was a member of the first Plant Science Delegation to the People's Republic of China in 1974. In 1975 he was a member of the FAO Mission to appraise vegetable research in the tropics.

In recent years, when Henry Munger really had begun to slow down, he was heard to say that he couldn't imagine a career more meaningful and satisfying than the career he had known. Henry was a devoted husband to his wife of 54 years, Norma, and a devoted father to his daughters Martha and Nancy. One of his former graduate students captured the feeling of those of us who knew Henry by his statement read at Henry's memorial service, "We will miss Henry as a teacher, mentor, colleague, but most of all as a friend."

Edwin B. Oyer, Chairperson; Elmer E. Ewing, Royse P. Murphy, Robert L Plaisted, Robert D. Sweet