

# Ora Smith

*April 13, 1900 — February 4, 1993*

Dr. Ora Smith, who lived to be 92, was one of the world's most productive and best known potato researchers. Dr. Smith was born in Freeburg, Illinois. He received a B.S. degree from the University of Illinois, an M.S. degree from Iowa State University, and a Ph.D. degree in plant physiology from the University of California in 1929. The following year Dr. Smith joined the Department of Vegetable Crops at Cornell University, where he devoted more than 50 years to research, teaching, and writing about the potato. During this time he was author or co-author of more than 500 popular and scientific articles, numerous contributions to encyclopedias and handbooks, and two books.

Dr. Smith's career by no means ended upon his appointment as professor emeritus in 1967, for he continued his writing as long as his health permitted. The fourth edition of the popular book *Potato Processing* appeared in 1987, and he had almost completed a third edition of *Potatoes: Production, Storing, Processing* to update the edition that appeared in 1983. Both books are well known by potato growers, processors, and researchers around the world.

Although Dr. Smith carried out research and teaching on many aspects of potato production and storage, he was best known for his work on potato quality, especially quality for processing. After World War II, when he began to give major attention to processing quality, only 2% of the U.S. crop was processed. Dr. Smith anticipated the growing popularity of potato chips and french fries and pioneered studies on how to grow, store, and evaluate potatoes that would have acceptable quality for these uses. He was the first director for research of what was then the Potato Chip Institute International (now the Snack Food Institute International), carrying out these duties for 26 years while continuing to serve as a member of the Cornell faculty.

Dr. Smith stressed the importance of tuber specific gravity for processing quality and developed the "potato hydrometer" that is still used widely to measure specific gravity. Another aspect of potato quality emphasized by Dr. Smith was the role of reducing sugars in producing the browning of chips and french fries. He was a pioneer not only in quick methods to measure quality for processing, but also in finding cultural and storage practices that would lead to better quality. Dr. Smith was a forceful spokesman for his views and effectively used both the written and spoken word to persuade others to change.

Under Dr. Smith's supervision, 27 students received the Ph.D. degree, many of whom have led prominent careers in research institutes, universities, and agricultural and food industries. These included three members or former

members of the Cornell Faculty: W.C. Kelly, Professor Emeritus of Vegetable Crops; R.S. Shallenberger, Professor Emeritus of Food Science and Technology; and R.L. Sawyer, former Professor of Vegetable Crops and founder and first Director General of the International Potato Center.

Dr. Smith himself had a strong international interest. During 1946-47 he was a member of the staff of the Inter-American Institute of Agricultural Sciences in Costa Rica. In 1938 Dr. Smith visited 75 colleges and experiment stations in 18 European countries. Dr. Smith was the only U.S. delegate to the Northwest Europe Potato Association Meeting in 1955; and he regularly attended meetings of the European Association for Potato Research, to which he belonged from the time of its founding.

Dr. Smith was an active member of the Potato Association of America, serving as its secretary for four years and as its president. He was awarded a plaque and cited for his outstanding service to the potato industry in 1959 by the National Potato Council, the first member of the academic field to be so honored. In 1967 and again in 1970, Dr. Smith was cited by the National Potato Utilization Conference for outstanding contributions to the meetings of that organization from its inception in 1947. He was the only person who has ever been made both an Honorary Life Member of the Potato Association of America (1960) and an Honorary Member of the European Association for Potato Research (1972).

Other honorary and scientific societies to which Dr. Smith belonged included the New York Academy of Sciences, American Association of University Professors, American Society for Horticultural Science, Soil Science Society of America, American Society of Agronomy, American Oil Chemists Society, Canadian Institute of Food Science and Technology, Institute for Food Technologists, American Institute of Biological Sciences, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science (of which he was a fellow). He was a member of Alpha Zeta, Alpha Tau Alpha, Phi Sigma, Phi Kappa Phi, Phi Tau Sigma, and Sigma Xi fraternities and scientific organizations. He was a member of President Eisenhower's Commission on Utilization of Farm Products and a member of the Advisory Board of Food Technology International, Inc. Dr. Smith also contributed many hours of voluntary service to youth and educational organizations in the Ithaca community.

Dr. Smith was married for 65 years to Dr. Laura Lee Weisbrodt Smith, Professor Emeritus in the Cornell School of Hotel Administration. Mrs. Smith died a few weeks after her husband. They are survived by a son, Dr. James S. Smith; a daughter, Sarah Jane Burton; a brother; nine grandchildren; and one great-grandchild.

*W.C. Kelly, J.B. Sieczka, E.E. Ewing*