

John Tomkins

May 5, 1918 — December 14, 2004

John Tomkins was born on May 5, 1918 on a dairy farm in western Pennsylvania. He received his B.S. and M.A. degrees from Penn State University before serving in the Army Corps of Engineers in World War II. He then became a Research Associate at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station at Geneva and received his Ph.D. degree in 1950. Dr. Tomkins then worked for three years at Michigan State University as a berry crops specialist, then for Welch's Grape Juice Cooperative, then back to the experiment station at Geneva. He became a Professor in the Department of Pomology at Ithaca in 1964, dividing his time between extension and teaching.

Dr. Tomkins taught two popular courses: the Essentials of Fruit Growing and Small Fruits. Students who appreciated his enthusiasm, generosity, and stories about his first-hand experiences in fruit production loved him. He was also very actively engaged in extension, visiting growers in each county of the state each year, and logging between 30 and 40,000 miles annually. Many growers, including nursery stock producers who produced small fruits as part of their inventory, considered John to be their friend, as well as their source of research-based information about berry production. Fruit growing was both John's profession and avocation. John took great pride in his very large garden in Dryden where he grew all sorts of fruits and vegetables, and generously shared them with neighbors. It was not unusual for John to unexpectedly show up at one's doorstep with a basket of berries, which, in his words, were specifically for jelly or jam making even though no one in the house knew how to make either. Many of John's innovations for strawberry, raspberry and blueberry production, in particular, could be seen in this garden. Later in his career, John helped to establish the North American Strawberry Growers Association, serving as this organization's executive secretary for many years. John was tall in stature and character, and was respected throughout the country as an authority in strawberries. He retired in 1983 and, with his wife, Gladys, moved to California to be closer to their three children. John passed away on December 14, 2004.

George Good, Marvin Pritts