

# Carl Feaster Receives 2009 Cotton Genetics Award

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NEW ORLEANS – Dr. Carl V. Feaster, a retired research agronomist and breeder, is the recipient of the 2009 Cotton Genetics Research Award.

The announcement was made here on January 7 during the 2010 Beltwide Cotton Improvement Conference, which convened as part of the National Cotton Council-coordinated 2010 Beltwide Cotton Conferences. In recognition, he received \$1,000.

Dr. Feaster's career in cotton agricultural research spanned almost 40 years as a research agronomist, professor of Plant Sciences at the University of Arizona and research leader, Cotton Breeding and Production Unit of USDA's Agricultural Research Service in Phoenix, Arizona.

During his career in Phoenix, Dr. Feaster and his team developed and released six commercial varieties of American Pima cotton, and Feaster himself also made 225 germplasm releases. The *Gossypium Barbadosense* collection is a valuable tool in breeding for molecular markers.

"It is not an exaggeration to say that had it not been for Dr. Feaster and his USDA cotton breeding program, there would not be an Extra-Long Staple (ELS) cotton industry in the United States today," said one of the nominators, Jesse Curlee, president of Phoenix-based Supima, an organization dedicated to promoting the use of American Pima cotton worldwide. "The respect and admiration that Dr. Feaster has earned from the scientific community, as well as the entire cotton supply chain from producer, ginner, shipper/merchant and textile manufacturer, is an indication of his major contribution to this industry."

Curlee said each succeeding Pima variety released has shown improvements in both yield and fiber properties. He said average yields for American Pima cotton were in the range of 400 pounds per acre when Dr. Feaster began his Phoenix-based breeding program. However, his last official release, Pima S-7, has ranged from 1,000 to 1,800 pounds per acre in the San Joaquin Valley of California. Also, production of American Pima cotton has increased from an average of 85,000 bales in the 1970's to a five-year average from 2004-2008 of 684,000 bales – a 700 percent increase.

Curlee said substantial quality improvements made with the releases of Pima S-5, S-6 and S-7, helped lead to a major and much larger market for American Pima cotton.

Curlee said that although Dr. Feaster can truly be referred to as the “Father of the U.S. Pima Cotton Breeding, the breeder’s former and present colleagues said that the scientist’s breeding efforts or germplasm releases have contributed to quality improvements in Upland cottons as well, including Acala varieties in California.

Another nominator, Earl Williams, president/CEO of California Cotton Ginners and Growers Associations, also noted Dr. Feaster’s key role in bringing pima cottons forward as an important part of the Western cotton industry.

“Pima cotton has become a large part of California’s cotton industry with over 90 percent of the U.S. pima production coming from California,” Williams said.

Dr. Feaster, who earned a B.S. in Agricultural Education from Purdue, and his M.A. (Field Crops) and Ph.D. (Plant Breeding) from the University of Missouri, worked as a USDA breeder in Missouri, Kentucky and Maryland before arriving in Phoenix in 1956 as a USDA research agronomist. In 1972, he became research leader of USDA’s Cotton Breeding and Production Unit in Phoenix and a professor in the University of Arizona’s Plant Sciences Department – positions he held until his 1994 retirement. He also produced or collaborated on 72 publications.

Among Dr. Feaster's awards are the Norman E. Borlaug award from the World Farm Foundation in 1974, the University of Arizona Centennial Medallion award in 1976 and the Arizona Cotton Growers Association's Outstanding Achievement Award in 1979.

U.S. commercial cotton breeders have presented the Cotton Genetics Research Award for more than 40 years to a scientist for outstanding basic research in cotton genetics. The Joint Cotton Breeding Committee, comprised of representatives from state experiment stations, USDA, private breeders and the National Cotton Council, establishes award criteria.

Source: National Cotton Council