



## IN MEMORIAM

Maurice L. Peterson  
Professor of Agronomy, Emeritus  
Davis  
1913 — 2002

Maurice Lewellan Peterson was born on December 30, 1913 at Lyons, Nebraska and died at his home in Davis, California on August 6, 2002. His early education was at a country school with eight grades taught by one teacher as was customary in rural Nebraska at that time. He graduated from Lyons High School in 1931 and then helped his father operate the family farm until 1934. In the fall of 1934, he entered the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, graduating in 1938 with a B.S. in agronomy. In August of that year he married Katharine A. Jones who had received her B.S. degree also at UNL in 1937 in home economics. The following two years, they lived at Manhattan, Kansas, where Dr. Peterson received his M.S. in plant breeding at Kansas State College.

In July 1940, Peterson accepted a position as junior agronomist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture at the Southern Great Plains Field Station, Woodward, Oklahoma. Here he began the country's first plant breeding activities with the native grasses adapted to the arid Great Plains to develop strains that could be used for revegetation of lands that had been abandoned from wheat production after World War I.

In 1943, Dr. Peterson enrolled in graduate study at Iowa State University and received his Ph.D. degree in plant physiology in 1946 under the direction of Professor Walter E. Loomis. His Ph.D. research focused on flowering- responses in plants, especially photoperiodism and vernalization. He maintained that interest throughout his career, resuming research with rice, wheat and oat after his long period of administrative service, noted below. Dr. Peterson remained at Iowa State University in a research position until 1948 when he joined the UC Davis faculty as assistant professor of agronomy. He continued his research on forage plants, especially ryegrass and clovers, while initiating a new program in improvement of irrigated pastures.

Much of Dr. Peterson's career was devoted to the University and public service. He was chairman of the Department of Agronomy from 1952 until 1959 and returned to research and teaching until 1962 when he was invited to serve as director of The Agricultural Experiment Station with headquarters at the UC Office of the President at Berkeley with responsibilities for agricultural research programs at Davis, Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Riverside campuses. Soon thereafter, he was named the first University dean of agriculture, a position he held until 1967 when he resumed his teaching and research on the Davis campus. He developed a popular course on agricultural research administration that was much appreciated by international graduate students. From 1967 until his retirement he made numerous contributions in rice research. He established the Rice Research Facility on the Davis campus and developed a research program on cold tolerance in rice. He had a leadership role for University and industry collaboration in rice research and was instrumental in developing a long- term rice research funding program with the California rice growers. Results from his research assisted rice breeders in selecting varieties that could be grown in cooler regions of California. He maintained a liaison role with rice growers for several years after retirement and promoted cooperative projects with the Rice Research Center at Biggs, CA.

He was an influential representative of the University in international affairs and programs. He was a member of the Research Advisory Committee of the U.S. Agency for International Development from 1963 to 1981. In this position, he reviewed research proposals for various countries in South America, Africa, and Asia. As

a member of the Planning Council for the Ford Foundation (1964-66), he was instrumental in establishing a large Ford Foundation- sponsored program with the University of California and the University of Chile. In 1966, he was appointed to a 14- member team under the leadership of Secretary of Agriculture, Orville Freeman, to provide President Johnson with an overview of U.S.- sponsored agricultural development programs in Vietnam. He provided leadership in winning a collaborative rice improvement research program for the University of California and the Government of Egypt. He directed this highly successful program from 1979 to 1982. In 1966, he and his wife were invited guests for a 20- day visit to Romania by the Romanian Higher Council of Agriculture.

Dr. Peterson retired in 1981 after 33 years of service to the University of California. In that same year, he received an Honorary Doctor of Science from his alma mater, the University of Nebraska. He received the University of California's Division of Agricultural Sciences Citation for Outstanding Public Service and Leadership. He was a Fellow in the American Society of Agronomy and President of the Crop Science Society of America in 1959.

Pete, as he was affectionately known, is remembered for his long and unselfish service as a Department administrator, an effective dean of agriculture in the UC Office of the President, a sensitive and effective mentor of graduate students, a productive research agronomist, and for his leadership in developing innovative research and development programs for California and global agriculture.

He is survived by his wife of 68 years and three sons, David of Madison, Wisconsin; James of Sunnyvale, California; and Gary of Davis, California.

Jim Hill  
Bill Rains  
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