

From the Oat Newsletter, volume 41, 1990:

Howard F. Harrison  
Award for Distinguished Service to Oat Improvement



Mr. Howard Harrison retired from his position as Senior Wheat and Oat Breeder, The New Northrup King Seed Co. (formerly, Coker's Pedigreed Seed Co. of Hartsville, South Carolina) in July, 1989. He had been a small grains breeder with Coker for over 30 years, and during this long period of service, he released over 30 improved wheat and oat varieties that substantially contributed to small grain and livestock production throughout the "southern" U. S. small grain production area.

Howard Harrison was born January 4, 1924, in Crawfordville, Georgia, and was raised on a farm there. He entered the U. S. Marines in 1941 at age 17, and served in the Pacific Theater in World War II as a radioman. After discharge from the Marines, he attended the University of Georgia, receiving the B. S. and M. S. degrees in Agronomy in 1952 and 1954, respectively. Following completion of his education at the University of Georgia, he was employed by the the Coker's Pedigreed Seed Company, and began his long and successful career as a small grains breeder at the company headquarters in Hartsville, South Carolina. With Mr. Sam Hadden, his predecessor and co-worker at Coker, he released 'Suregrain' in 1957 and 'Moregrain ' in 1958. Suregrain continues to be the most popular oat variety in Argentina to the present time, and is used extensively for livestock forage, for grain production, and as a milling oat.

In 1958, Mr. Harrison was employed as Assistant Agronomist at the University of Georgia's Coastal Plains Experiment Station at Tifton. His responsibilities included

maintaining peanut seedstocks; he hauled the Foundation Seed of experiment station varieties up to Plains, Georgia every year to be shelled by a young peanut processor named Jimmy Carter. Following the sudden death of Mr. Sam Hadden in 1961, Howard Harrison returned to the Coker's Pedigreed Seed Company, and assumed sole leadership of the small grains breeding program.

Howard Harrison's contributions to oat improvement include the release of 13 oat varieties that had a great impact on oat production in the U. S. "winter" oat area. He released the first two U. S. oat varieties with crown rust resistance derived from Avena sterilis, Coker 227 and Coker 234. Both of these varieties have remained in commercial production for over 20 years. He subsequently released at least nine additional oat varieties having rust resistance derived from Avena sterilis. His varieties and germplasm lines have been used extensively as parents in other breeding programs, as sources of resistance to crown rust, stem rust, and barley yellow dwarf virus (BYDV). Therefore, his material has contributed to oat improvement throughout the U. S.; it also has been used extensively in developing germplasm and improved varieties for Latin American countries in Quaker Oats' International breeding effort.

Mr. Harrison also had an extremely successful career as a wheat breeder, releasing 19 improved varieties of soft red winter wheat. These wheat varieties did much to revitalize wheat production in the southeastern U. S.. In 1982, he was named "Man of the Year in Southern Agriculture" by Progressive Farmer Magazine, in recognition of the contributions he had made toward improved agricultural production. He also was named "Distinguished Agronomist of the Year" by the Agronomy Society of South Carolina in 1982, and received the Gamma Sigma Delta Award of Merit for distinguished service to agriculture from the University of Georgia Chapter at his alma mater in 1983. He also received recognition from both the nation-wide organization and the Carolina-Virginia regional chapter of the National Agricultural Marketing Association in 1985. Other awards included the "Drug Science Foundation Award" for contributions to science in South Carolina, and a "Certificate of Appreciation" presented by the North Carolina Crop Improvement Association in 1989.

Those who know Howard Harrison best appreciate his plant breeding skill, his humor, and his common-sense approach to his work and to life. Howard is a modest individual who is likely to "poke fun" at his own accomplishments; his sense of humor does not tolerate much pomposity in anyone. His philosophy of plant breeding is perhaps best summed up in a bit of advice he once gave a young plant breeder: "Remember, it's hard to get all your coons up a single tree!" Although he recognized that this was true, he was successful in combining many desirable traits in his own varieties and germplasm lines, through his dedicated and untiring efforts to improve oats; the crop is better as a result of his work.