

**2024 American Oat Workers' Conference
Award for Distinguished Service to Oat Improvement**



Stephen (Steve) Harrison, PhD

Stephen Harrison is a second-generation wheat and oat breeder. He grew up in Hartsville, SC, USA, working for his father (Howard Harrison), who was wheat and oat breeder for Coker's Pedigreed Seed Company. He completed a Bachelor's in Agronomy from the University of Georgia in 1977 and a Master's in Agronomy – Plant Breeding in 1980, under the direction of Dr. Roger Boerma. He completed a PhD in 1984 at the University of Illinois in Agronomy – Plant Breeding under the guidance of Cecil Nickell. He met his wife Margaret at a 'pick-up' softball game while a student at the University of Illinois.

Upon completion of his PhD in 1984, Steve was hired as wheat and oat breeder by Louisiana State University's Agricultural Center and has been in that position for 40 years. During that time, he has taught introductory and advanced plant breeding courses many times and has advised a number of graduate students who also went on to become successful plant breeders. He has released or co-released 17 oat varieties and 11 wheat varieties. One of his wheat varieties, LA841, was grown on ~75% of Louisiana acres at one time and generated \$400,000+ in yearly royalties. His deer food plot oat has generated ~\$90,000 per year in royalties for many years.

Steve is chair of the SunGrains (Southeastern University Grains) small grains breeding collaborative group that includes six other southern universities. SunGrains is the most impressive example of multi-state research collaboration in existence and includes regional nurseries, open germplasm exchange, shared royalties, and an extensive genomic selection and genomics database. Through SunGrains, graduate students are able to grow research project materials in multiple environments to increase the impact of their research.

Steve also coordinates the USDA International Oat Nursery (ION) and collaborates with many other breeders on a global basis. The ION is the most important oat germplasm exchange system in existence, with 34 oat breeding programs involved. This program has resulted in the release of

numerous varieties, particularly in South America. Because the Louisiana environment is ideal for screening germplasm for resistance to crown and stem rust, Steve has collaborated on numerous mapping and introgression projects to develop resistance to these important oat diseases.