

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



**Eric (Rick) N. Jellen, PhD**

Unique knowledge; intrepid scientist; dedicated service; contagious enthusiasm; eager collaborator; engaging speaker; sincere humanitarian – these are just some of the words that come to mind when describing Rick Jellen's long and continuing career in oat research.

Rick Jellen received his bachelor's degree in Agronomy from Brigham Young University (BYU) in 1986, and his MSc. and Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota in 1988 and 1992, respectively. Rick studied with two of the greats: Howard Rines and Ron Phillips, and soon carved out a special niche of his own as an international authority on oat cytogenetics. After his postdoctoral work at the USDA Plant Science and Entomology Research Unit, Kansas (1992-1996), he moved to a tenure track position at BYU's Department of Plant & Wildlife Sciences, where he became a full professor, as well as Department Chair and Associate Dean of the College of Life Sciences.

Those who generate and apply knowledge of oat genetics and genomics are well-aware of the special challenges presented by the complex oat genome, and of the critical role Rick has played in nurturing this science from early discoveries through to complete genome sequences. In his early career, Rick developed and characterized a series of oat monosomic and nullisomic lines, which were foundational in identifying and characterizing the 21 pairs of oat chromosomes. As genomic technologies progressed from genetic markers to high-throughput sequencing, Rick's patient and observant expertise in cytogenetics remained key to linking these advances to physical chromosomes, germplasm, and tangible applications. If you email Rick with a question or idea, you can be assured of a prompt and informative response, drawn from his encyclopedic knowledge and memory of oat germplasm. And if he doesn't have the answer already, he may volunteer to look at some chromosome squashes for you, and then send you back a carefully labelled picture of tangled chromosomes that no-one else on the planet could tell apart, but which

somehow turns out to be correct. Many of us have shared a Friday afternoon email thread with Rick that is at once both fun and serious, and a refreshing reminder of why we do science.

Rick's dedication to the science and improvement of oat extends far beyond his cytogenetics laboratory. He has aided and influenced scientists, farmers, and industry around the globe. He has been instrumental in collecting germplasm, advising international development teams, enabling breeding efforts, and interpreting genomic sequences. And somehow, between his many travels and research occupations, he has found time to teach six different courses, advise 48 students, publish 89 peer reviewed papers and 16 book chapters, serve as a Department Chair and Associate Dean, organize a yearly oat workshop, and co-chair the AOWC.

We congratulate Rick on his well-deserved receipt of the AOWC Distinguished Service Award, July 23, 2024.