

From the Oat Newsletter, volume 43, 1995:

DR. IRVIN MILBURN ATKINS, 1904-1995
--IN MEMORIAM--

Dr. I. M. Atkins, Professor Emeritus, Texas A&M University, died February 13, 1995, in Hereford, TX. He enjoyed good health until near the time of his death at age 90. Dr. Atkins had many aliases in his long and distinguished career as a small grain and flax breeder. To many of his associates he was simply "Doc," while others addressed him as "I.M.," "Milburn," or "Atty". Each "handle" was used with deep respect and affection, for he was a remarkably accomplished research worker and administrator who left his indelible mark on four crops -- oats, wheat, barley and flax.

Dr. Atkins was in the first group to be honored with the award for Distinguished Service to Oat Improvement (1970). In the citation for that award, Dr. Atkins' extensive publication record and his prolific research output (numerous improved cultivars of oats, wheat, barley and flax) were noted. Some of his oat cultivars, particularly 'Bronco' and 'Mustang' greatly improved winterhardiness of oats adapted for production in Texas, while one of his last oat releases, 'Coronado,' had unusual "staying-power" in Texas, and also has had international impact as both a commercial cultivar and as a breeding line in Latin America.

Dr. Atkins was born July 24, 1904, in Coming, KS. He married Mary Loveless of Denton, TX, in 1932. He graduated from Kansas State University and began his career as a Junior Agronomist with the USDA at the Texas A&M University Field Station at San Antonio, in 1928. In 1930, he became Associate Agronomist with the USDA at the Texas A&M Station at Denton, TX, where he remained until 1954. He received his M.S. degree from Kansas State University and his Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota. He was promoted to the USDA rank of Agronomist in 1946, and in 1954 was transferred to Texas A&M University, where he became Professor and Leader of the Small Grains Section. After retirement in 1968, Dr. Atkins worked as a consultant with several seed companies, and developed three winter wheat cultivars and four spring wheat cultivars. Few, if any, other small grain breeders can claim the development and release of seven cultivars after "retirement."

Dr. Atkins had always been interested in history, and published "A History of Small Grain Crops in Texas, 1582-1969", "Flax in Texas, 1718-1976", "Old Number 6 and the Texas Small Grains Program, 1889-1969" (a history of the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station at Denton), "The Autobiography of a Plant Breeder", and "Some Things Remembered", all after his retirement at Texas A&M. Following the death of his beloved wife, Mrs. Mary Atkins, Dr. Atkins established the Irvin M. Atkins and Mary Ruth Atkins Fellowship at Texas A&M University, recognizing the hardship that graduate school represents.

Dr. Atkins endowed this fellowship to provide deserving students in small grain research studies with additional support to reduce their financial burden. This endowment has been supplemented by contributions from some of Dr. Atkins' scientific and commercial associates, and by his wheat cultivar royalties; current assets approach \$90,000.00.