



## **Dr. Nicholas (Nick) A. Tinker retires from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada**

Nick Tinker retired from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) on the 13<sup>th</sup> of January, 2023. It was a Friday - and bad luck for the department and the oat world!

As luck would have it, though, the Plant and Animal Genome conference (PAG) in San Diego, USA, also started on that day, and a number of people were invited to stop over in Ottawa on their way home. Meetings were held on January 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> to discuss the PanOat and TUGBOAT (Targeted and Useful Genomics in Barley and Oat) projects, and we also had a bit of a party to celebrate Nick's achievements!

Wubishet (Wubi) Bekele hosted the workshop at the Ottawa Research and Development Centre, and we were very pleased to be able to welcome Martin Mascher and Manuel Spannagl from Germany, Alf Ceplitis and Pernilla Vallenback from Sweden, Catherine Howarth from the UK, Rick Jellen and Jean-Luc Jannink from the USA, and Jaswinder Singh and Rajvinder Kaur from McGill University, just down the road in Montreal. The group travelled to McGill on the second day of the workshop to see Jaswinder's lab and meet the members of his team.

Because of ongoing COVID restrictions, only a small group of people could attend the meetings or the party, but a number of people did join on-line to hear more about Nick's 26-plus years doing research in oat genomics.

On April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1996, Nick joined AAFC as a junior scientist on what was known as "The Quaker Project". This was a consortium of North American breeders, geneticists, and others brought together by the Quaker Oats Company to develop molecular marker tools for use in oat breeding. Nick quickly showed that he was a valuable addition to the team, not just for his skills in molecular marker mapping, but also for his ability to write computer programs that were immensely helpful in analyzing the results of the work. He had already written a program for QTL analysis called 'MQTL' while a postdoc working on barley with Diane Mather at McGill, and went on to develop other programs such as 'Gregor', 'M5', 'COOL-DUDE', and 'Haplotag'.

Nick became a full-fledged Research Scientist at AAFC in 1999, and participated in many more projects over the years. Projects Nick was a part of always had to have clever acronyms as their names – see "TUGBOAT" above! A quick internet search will bring up the dozens of peer-reviewed and other articles to which he contributed, including the 'Sang' reference genome paper published last year in the journal 'Nature'.

As Nick's influence grew, so did his team, which expanded to include more technicians, graduate students, and postdocs, many of whom came to Ottawa from other countries. Nick is proud to see how successful many of these people have become in the years since!

Nick was always in demand as a member of committees, and chaired the American Oat Workers' committee for four years following the conference in Ottawa in 2014. He also co-chaired the last International Oat Conference with Catherine Howarth.



While Nick is now officially retired, he has agreed to stay on at AAFC as an Honorary Research Associate. We all look forward to continued collaborations, while, at the same time, wishing him all the best in pursuing newer, more relaxing endeavours!

Below are some photos from the workshop and party, starting with the PanOat/TUGBOAT meeting in the KW Neatby Bldg. on Ottawa's Central Experimental Farm...



Dr. Marcos Alvarez, Ottawa RDC director (DRDT) and Wubi made the opening remarks....







Off for lunch – a brisk walk down the hill to Dow's Lake, part of the Rideau Canal World Heritage site...









On the way back, Nick showed off the Building 50 greenhouse complex, where his first lab was....



Charlene Wight, Nick's first tech, described his evolution over the years...







Nick's rebuttal after all the speeches...and then a few gifts!



Nick received gifts from the lab, the centre, and from individuals like Jaswinder and Rajvinder...



We did eventually get cake...







After a tour of the facilities at Ottawa RDC and a visit to the Canadian Museum of History (where the banquet for AOWC 2014 was held), we went for dinner at Les Brasseurs du Temps. This restaurant includes a beer museum – fitting, given Nick’s projects on barley at the beginning and end of his career...



The massive snow storm that evening also served to remind our guests that it was winter in Ottawa!

The next day, some of us went to McGill University’s McDonald campus just west of Montreal to visit Jaswinder’s lab. Jaswinder’s work focusses on transformation and gene editing in cereals...







All-in-all, it was a wonderful two days. Many thanks to everyone involved in the event, and congratulations and best wishes to Nick in his retirement!

*(Photos by Asuka Itaya, Charlene Wight, and Lu Fan)*