

**Gordon Rowland Presentation of Appreciation
Flax Day 2010
January 11th, 2010
Saskatoon Inn, Saskatoon, SK.**

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I will be the first to admit that when I initially began putting my notes together for this presentation, I was a bit confused. Why was the Saskatchewan Flax Development Commission offering words of appreciation to a man who would not be officially retiring until December 31st of this year?

But of course, it does make tremendous sense, because the man we are honoring today, may well not be attendance next year. As is often the case with retirees that after years of dedication to their work, he they may well be off in a far-off place on any number of wondrous adventures. But rest assured we will miss him and miss him tremendously.

Gordon Rowland received his B.S.A. (Honours) from the University of Manitoba in 1968, he then earned his Ph.D. there as well, in the Department of Plant Sciences, Cytogenetics.

Dr. Rowland began his plant breeding career in 1971 at Saskatoon's Crop Development Centre (CDC) with a focus on faba beans which was part of the CDC's mandate to develop new crops for Saskatchewan farmers.

Dr. Rowland added flax to his portfolio in the mid 1970s as a result of a request from the Flax Growers of Western Canada that the CDC mount a flax breeding program specifically for the prairies. Up to that time, the varieties that were commonly grown had not been developed for the western prairies with its unique short growing season.

Dr. Rowland's first flax variety release was Vimy in 1986. This variety was noted for its large seed, which gave it two advantages – it germinated and grew well under dryland conditions in southern Saskatchewan. Its large seed made it desirable food type flax. The release of Vimy was the catalyst for the tremendous growth in flax acreage in Saskatchewan in the 1990s. Vimy continues to be a popular choice to this day.

A number of other varieties have been released over the past twenty years with the result that for the past decade Dr. Rowland's varieties are grown on close to 80% of the flax acres in western Canada. Notable varieties with respect to market share include Vimy, Somme, Flanders, CDC Normandy, CDC Bethune, and CDC Sorrel. It is estimated that the contribution of Dr. Rowland's program to western Canadian farm-gate income in the last half of the previous decade averaged \$155 million per year

Dr. Rowland's approach throughout his career has been one of creativity and innovation. He is renown as an early adopter of new breeding tools. Single seed descent is commonly used in his program, as is the half seed technique.

Dr. Rowland introduced a mutagenesis program in the late 1980s to develop the low linolenic attribute. Up to that time flax, with its unique oil character was primarily an

industrial oil, used in paint and linoleum manufacture where coating and drying were important factors. However, its high linolenic acid profile meant that the oil would go rancid very quickly. The low linolenic attribute was seen as opening up the possibility for flax to become an edible oil. The character was found and fixed in the germplasm, and utilized in a backcrossing program to bring it into elite germplasm. However, modifying oil profile can affect other characteristics of the seed, and it was found that the low linolenic character decreased germination success; so it was some time before the first low linolenic variety with good agronomic characters was released (CDC Gold).

Dr. Rowland has been a strong advocate of the use of mutagenesis to bring new variation into his program for such characteristics as oil profile. Recently Dr. Rowland has worked closely with molecular geneticists to develop Recombinant Inbred Lines in order to find and fix new attributes.

I could fill the balance of my time listing the honours, awards and recognitions that Dr. Rowland has received.

Among them:

- Member and former Director, Crop Development Centre, which received the 2005 Agriculture Excellence Award from the Saskatchewan Institute of Agrologists
- Honorary Life Membership, Canadian Seed Growers' Association
- Named to the W.J. White Chair in Plant Sciences. January 1, 2003 to December 31, 2006
- Saskatchewan Institute of Agrologists "Distinguished Agrologist Award", 2002
- Corporate-Higher Education-Hewlett Packard (Canada) Award, 1999
- Honorary Life Membership, Saskatchewan Seed Growers Association, January 1999
- 1998 Ag-West Biotech Inc. Distinguished Scientist Award, June 1998

But the true merit of a person is probably best measured by the impact he or she has had on the lives of others and once again Dr. Rowland raises the bar for each and every one of us.

As word got out and spread that SaskFlax was putting this piece together, it wasn't long before emails and phone call were coming in from folks asking if they too, might make a contribution. I would like to conclude by sharing some of those with you.

What struck me very profoundly in reading them over was Gordon's ability to reach the farmer in each of us, despite the letters before and after his name. I heard such comments as, "I think Gordon is really a farmer at heart." And,

“Gordon is unlike a lot of science types and he is able to communicate to the SaskFlax Board in a language we could understand. He has made himself available. Gordon is a very successful plant breeder, yet is very down to earth and unassuming. Saskatchewan’s flax growers owe Gordon and his shop considerable debt, not just for the successful varieties he made available, but also for all of the extra work he put into flax over the years.”

...Along those same lines, from two other producers who have also spent time on the SaskFlax Board both as members and as Chair...

“Gordon has been deemed as one of those stand-up kinda guys. He always stood out in terms of the work he did despite often working with limited funds. He wanted to make sure the flax industry moved ahead.”

From another, “As flax growers we have been extremely lucky to have as fine a man and as dedicated a flax breeder as Dr. Rowland on our side for pretty much the length of his professional career...It’s been a pleasure to know Gordon and be associated with him on a journey over the past number of years dedicated to [improving] the lot of Saskatchewan Flax Growers.”

But of course, Gordon had a profound influence not only on flax producers, but also within his day-to-day activities at the Crop Development Centre.

One of many roles he assumed was that of mentor and we received this from a past student at the U of S who has gone on to his own professional career in the province.

“My personal interaction with Gordon was very pleasant as a student. When I came to the U of S in 1995, he was the Director for CDC. Even though he didn’t have any professional relationship with my research or me, he was very encouraging when we sat down for coffee and lunch in our coffee room. I found him very positive, approachable, friendly and a very knowledgeable person. I am sure he will get similar comments from a lot of International students in the Plant Sciences Dept.”

He was also a boss and this from one of his team member:

“Gordon has been very good to work with and for. He is always very appreciative of the work I do for him. He has put his trust in others and me within his program, allowing us to organize and coordinate daily and weekly tasks. When juggling work time with personal he has always been very accommodating and flexible...

If I ever needed a weather update, I could usually get an accurate forecast from Gordon...He always invites his staff to the Faculty Club at Christmas time for lunch as an expression of appreciation for the year’s work. This has been a real highlight for me and a nice gathering that I will miss after he retires.”

From a fellow flax breeder, “ I have a lot of respect for Gordon Rowland. He is a very productive flax breeder whose varieties have dominated acreage in Western Canada. Throughout his career, Gordon had a simple but effective strategy...to focus on yield. For traditional flax, yield is the only characteristic that increases profitability for producers...I will miss Gordon at various meetings and conferences that flax workers gather at. He has always been very friendly and a pleasure to talk to.”

And last, but by no means least from someone he works closely with, “Dr. Rowland is one of life’s good people. He is always kind, respectful and interested in what is going on. He gives great advice, based on his wealth of knowledge and experience in all aspects of western Canadian agriculture. He is, in his unassuming way, a leader in value creation in Western Canada.”

As we all know, the word retirement means different things to people. In true Dr. Rowland fashion and with respect to his many years of notable success, he was recently awarded the 5 year multi-million dollar Genome Canada/Genome Prairie Project where he will be at the helm of team of scientists working primarily out of the University of Saskatchewan. This consortium of scientists will utilize what they know about the flax genome and move it forward to practical tools to be used in gaining efficiency in plant breeding and variety development for food and fibre.

Good luck Gordon and sincere wishes from all of us on a long and healthy retirement!