

# Percy wins cotton genetics award

**R**ICHARD G. Percy, a USDA Agricultural Research Service geneticist, has earned the 2006 Cotton Genetics Research Award. The award was given at the Cotton Improvement Conference of the 2007 Beltwide Cotton Conferences, which the National Cotton Council coordinates.

Percy, who received \$1,000 in recognition of his efforts, works in the cotton physiology, genetics and host-plant-resistance research unit at the Western Cotton Research Laboratory in Maricopa, Ariz. He also is an adjunct professor of plant sciences at the University of Arizona.

Throughout his career, Percy has demonstrated a multidisciplinary approach to identify and ameliorate limiting factors in the production of high-quality cotton. During 2006, he released three high-quality, heat-adapted

### Key Points

- Richard G. Percy receives the 2006 Cotton Genetics Research Award.
- Percy released three high-quality, heat-adapted germplasm lines in 2006.
- Percy uses a multidisciplinary approach to push cotton yield.

germplasm lines. A germplasm line with superior adaptation specific for California also was derived from that project and will be released.

Don Jones, associate director of agricultural research for Cotton Incorporated and one of Percy's nominators, says Percy shows an ability to wisely choose relevant issues to study and to communicate with colleagues.

"Dr. Percy took the lead in population development and early generation

selection and coordinated the evaluation of advance lines in cooperation with his colleagues," Jones says. "He fully understands that United States cotton producers face mounting input expenses and competitive pressure from man-made fibers. His projects are improving cotton in terms of yield, quality and abiotic stress tolerance."

Percy also has demonstrated a spirit of cooperation and service. He has served on the Cotton Germplasm Committee for Crop Science, as an editor for the *Journal of Cotton Science*, as chairman of the Beltwide Cotton Improvement Conference, and as a co-chairman of the Germplasm and Genetic Stocks Workgroup at the International Cotton Genome Initiative meetings in India and

Brazil. He also hosted the 2006 Cotton Heat Tolerance Workshop.

Prior to joining USDA-ARS in 1984, Percy was a research associate at the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station in College Station. He holds a bachelor's degree in biology from Texas Tech University and a master's degree and doctorate in genetics from Texas A&M University. He has authored more than 50 publications, 33 of which were in peer-reviewed journals.

U.S. commercial cotton breeders have presented the Cotton Genetics Research Award for more than 40 years. The Joint Cotton Breeding Committee, comprised of representatives from state experiment stations, USDA, private breeders and the NCC, sets award criteria.



**RICHARD G. PERCY**

# Wilkins is cotton biotech honoree

**T**HEA A. Wilkins, Bayer CropScience regents professor at Texas Tech University, is the recipient of the 2006 Cotton Biotechnology Award. She was awarded the honor at the Cotton Improvement Conference, part of the National Cotton Council-coordinated 2007 Beltwide Cotton Conferences.

Wilkins, who received \$2,000 in recognition of her efforts, is director of the TTU Center of Excellence in Agricultural Genomics and Biotechnology. She was the first to discover the signal for vacuolar sorting — an effort that has remained a research standard for more than 15 years. Her other efforts include the development of the standard method for RNA isolation in cotton and identification of candidate genes with critical roles in fiber elongation. Wilkins' pioneering work with cotton transformation, where specific genes are placed into cotton, resulted in two issued and two pending patents.

"Her contributions to cotton biotechnology research have been and continue to be groundbreaking. They have laid the foundation upon which current work and progress in cotton biotechnology is based," says James McD. Stewart, Alheimer Chair for Cotton Research at the University of Arkansas

### Key Points

- Thea A. Wilkins receives the 2006 Cotton Biotechnology Award.
- Wilkins has two patents on cotton gene procedures with two others pending.
- Wilkins brings her research in genetics and genomics into the classroom.

and one of Wilkins' nominators.

Another nominator, Eric Hequet, associate director at the TTU International Textile Center, says, "Dr. Wilkins' efforts have begun to unravel the molecular basis of fiber quality. Her efforts to map genetic mutants [which have led to a clearer understanding of how cotton fiber develops], to formulate a related developmental model, and to advance developing cotton fibers as a single-celled genomics platform has provided the link between the genotype [the genetic makeup of cotton] and phenotype [what cotton can potentially look like in the field] in cotton. She is among the elite researchers in the field of cotton fiber research."

In addition to her biotechnology efforts, Wilkins integrates research activities into formal classroom training in genetics and genomics. She

hosted training workshops and was an active participant in the University of California, Davis, Partnership in Genomics Education Program and the National Science Foundation's Young Scholars Program. Since moving to TTU, she has been developing new curricula for graduate and undergraduate majors in genomics and bioinformatics. Wilkins also has two adjunct professorships at the Chinese Cotton Research Institute in Anyang City, China, and Alabama A&M University.

Prior to joining TTU in 2006, Wilkins rose through the ranks at UCD to become professor and director of the National Science Foundation Cotton Genome Center. She was also director of the UCD Cotton Functional Genomics Center beginning in 2002.

Wilkins earned a doctorate from Michigan State University in plant and cell biology in 1990, a master's degree in plant breeding and genetics from the University of Georgia in 1983, and a bachelor's degree in plant biology, graduating summa cum laude, from Georgia State University in 1980. She has received grants in excess of \$10,000,000 during her career and has authored numerous publications in peer-reviewed journals.

Volume 6 ■ Number 3

### Contents:

NewsWatch.....	1
Opinions and Letters.....	10
Crop Production.....	12
Machinery.....	21
Marketplace/Classified ....	M1
Property Management .....	26
Southern Farm Life .....	29
Forages .....	33
Livestock .....	34
Marketing .....	44

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# Jordan named honorary specialist

**A**NDREW Jordan, vice president of technical services for the National Cotton Council, was declared an honorary Extension cotton specialist recently. The honor was bestowed on Jordan by the country's cotton specialists at their annual meeting during the 2007 Beltwide Cotton Conferences.

J.C. Banks, cotton specialist for Oklahoma State University, made the presentation, saying "the Extension cotton specialists recognize and applaud Dr. Andrew Jordan for his dedication, vision, and expertise in furthering and serving the U.S. cotton industry."

Jordan worked with the NCC for more than 30 years before retiring in

February. His depth of technical knowledge and breadth of experience with the seven segments of the cotton industry have proved beneficial for the entire industry. During his tenure at the NCC, he has led educational efforts in the industry, including significant work in numerous areas of cotton production, among them physiology, insect control, biotechnology, technology transfer and stewardship.

### Constant Extension supporter

Sandy Stewart, Louisiana cotton specialist, said the group of specialists agreed Jordan was particularly deserving of the honorary specialist designation

due to his constant support of the specialists in the past few decades. He added that the timing of the 2007 Beltwide specialists meeting, sponsored by Delta and Pine Land Co., was an easy choice as the venue for bestowing the honor because of Jordan's imminent retirement.

"Andy has worked with our group on so many occasions that we almost immediately knew this was the best way for us to tell him thank you," Stewart said.

About 20 cotton specialists provide cross-discipline services (physiology, weed and insect control, etc.) to growers across the U.S. Cotton Belt.