



DESIGNER GENES: Dave Stelly (left) and Al Bell display their Cotton Genetics Research Award plaques. The presentation was made at the 2009 Beltwide Cotton Conferences in San Antonio. Forest Robinson, a third member of the College Station trio, was unable to attend.

Texas trio honored for cotton genetics

By J.T. SMITH

PERHAPS it's appropriate with Texas growing about half of the nation's cotton nowadays that a trio of

Key Points

- Texas trio combines efforts to win cotton genetics honor.
- Reniform nematode costs cotton industry millions of dollars.
- Resistance from wild cotton was transferred to upland cotton.

Texas researchers were recognized with the 2008 Cotton Genetics Award during the 2009 Beltwide Cotton Conferences this January in San Antonio.

The team of Al Bell, Forest Robinson and Dave Stelly were honored for a major breakthrough in transferring resistance to the reniform nematode from a wild cotton species into upland cotton. Each received \$400.

"This is a major accomplishment in the area of cotton genetics, and one that can have significant impacts on yield and profitability," notes Wayne Smith, professor and associate head of Texas A&M University's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, College Station.

Nematode damage

Losses to reniform nematodes can reach 50% in severely infested cotton fields and are estimated at \$130 million annually — or about 500,000 bales lost. In fact, the reniform nematode now causes more losses than the root-knot nematode, which once had been considered the most damaging nematode in U.S. cotton.

Bell, a USDA Agricultural Research Service plant pathologist, College Station, began a program of crossing and backcrossing to transfer resistance from a wild diploid species into upland cotton, so that breeders and seed companies then could breed resistance into modern, adapted cultivars.

Meanwhile, Robinson, an ARS research zoologist, College Station, worked on genetics and progeny evaluation for resistance.

Stelly, a Texas A&M professor of Molecular and Environmental Plant Sciences, joined the team to provide cytological evaluation to confirm resistance in true tetraploid, or upland, cotton, with 52 chromosomes in its somatic cells.

Stelly's lab identified closely linked markers to help identify resistant progeny by plant breeders.

Smith notes without these markers, the only way to pinpoint resistant plants would be to dig each plant from the soil and go through a time-consuming process of removing and counting eggs and nematodes, then selecting plants that support reduced numbers.

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 National Cotton Council, establishes award criteria.

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Where: Holiday Inn Hotel & Towers
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When: Wednesday, April 1, 2009
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No attendance fee; lunch will be provided. Please register to reserve your seat; space is limited

To register, contact Kay Wriedt at 919-678-2271 or kwriedt@cottoninc.com

