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Rick Bennett Awarded 2024 J. Roger Porter Award

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The United States Culture Collection Network (USCCN) is pleased to announce that Rick Bennett, Professor in the Department of Plant Pathology at the University of Kentucky, has been awarded the 2024 J. Roger Porter Award. This award honors his longstanding leadership and dedication to the preservation of microbial collections, recognizing the critical role he has played in safeguarding these invaluable resources.

The prestigious J. Roger Porter Award is presented annually to a scientist who has demonstrated the importance of microbial biodiversity through sustained curatorial and stewardship activities that benefit the scientific community. Rick Bennett's career exemplifies this commitment.

Bennett's career began with a 22-year tenure at the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS) where he led efforts to preserve ARS microbial collections and worked tirelessly to save orphan collections at risk of being lost due to retirements or lack of resources. He recognized the essential value of microbial collections not only for advancing research but also for identifying and validating future disease outbreaks. Such reference collections are vital for identifying pathogens, monitoring their evolution, and are important sources of valuable novel genes or chemical compounds.

Bennett has consistently advocated for greater resources and coordination to preserve the many plant-associated microbial collections established by government, academic, and industry scientists. As President of the American Phytopathological Society (APS) and a member of its Public Policy Board, he promoted initiatives to safeguard microbial collections. His advocacy was instrumental in bringing the APS community together to develop a proposal for a national plant-associated culture collections system. This led to increased coordination among USDA-ARS supported collections, and ultimately, the establishment of the U.S. Culture Collection Network (USCCN) in 2012.

Bennett has been a guiding force in the USCCN since its inception. Through his vision and volunteer efforts, he has helped position the network as a leader in the preservation and management of microbial genetic resources.

Remarkably, Bennett's support for culture collections is driven not by personal research needs but by his understanding of their essential value to the broader scientific community. Throughout his career, his dedication to the stewardship of ARS microbial resources and academically developed resources is unmatched in the United States.

Bennett will be formally recognized at the upcoming USCCN workshop "Exploring the Value of Microbial Germplasm for Research and Industry," on November 18 in St. Louis, MO.

About the J. Porter Award

The prestigious J. Roger Porter Award recognizes outstanding efforts by a scientist who has demonstrated the importance of microbial biodiversity through sustained curatorial or stewardship activities for a major resource used by the scientific community. It honors the memory of the internationally known microbiologist J. Roger Porter (1909-1979) and his remarkable contributions to science. More information including purpose, eligibility, nomination process, and past laureates are available at usccn.org/porter-award

About USCCN

The United States Culture Collection Network (USCCN) is a Research Coordination Network supported by the U.S. National Science Foundation through grants #1534564 and #2124633. The mission of the USCCN is to facilitate the safe and responsible utilization of microbial resources for research, education, industry, medicine, and agriculture for the betterment of humankind. For more information visit usccn.org and follow the network on Twitter and LinkedIn.

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