

**JOSEPH NEAL SASSER
(1921-2005)**

Joseph (Joe) Neal Sasser, pioneer and world authority on root-knot nematodes and a man of dignity and affable humor, died on August 17, 2005, at the age of 84. He is survived by his wife of 60 years – Laura Elizabeth (Lib) Long Sasser, 3 daughters, 1 son, 2 sister, 11 grandchildren, 3 great-grandchildren, and one great-great grandchild.

Joe was born on May 21, 1921, in Wayne County, North Carolina where he and his nine siblings were raised on a tobacco farm. Joe worked in the agricultural chemicals industry. It was at this time that nematologists A.L. Taylor inspired him to study plant-parasitic nematodes. Joe earned an M. S. degree at N.C. State College (1950) and the Ph. D. degree from the University of Maryland (1953).

In 1953 Dr. Sasser returned to N.C. State, assuming research and teaching duties in the Plant Pathology Department. His extensive research program involved many graduate students as well as a number of post doctorates and visiting scientists. Dr. Sasser, his students and other associates were among the first to study the physiological and biochemical pathways operative in plant-parasitic nematodes and to employ molecular techniques in root-knot nematode taxonomy. They also used cytogenetics and differential host specificity to characterize the worldwide genetic diversity among species and subspecies of root-knot nematodes.

During his involvement in N.C. State University's USAID (U.S. Agency for International Development) mission to Peru, Dr. Sasser developed an interest in a global approach to the root knot nematode problem. By the mid 1970s, he had conceptualized, organized, and implemented his widely acclaimed "International *Meloidogyne* Project" (IMP). That program, also funded by the USAID, aimed primarily at coordinating and promoting research on root-knot nematodes in many regions of the world, where nematodes along and in combination with other disease agents cause extensive crop losses. About 200 cooperators from 70 countries, organized in eight project regions, participated in the IMP. The IMP cooperators were encouraged and supported to conduct their own local research on nematode distribution, pathogen variability, host resistance, chemical, and biological control and on other facts of their personal scientific projects. Through that program, more than 1000

nematode populations of *Meloidogyne* species from around the world became available for comparative studies, including fundamental and applied research.

The IMP also facilitated global training programs in nematology, and in 1983 sponsored a comprehensive special course at N.C. State University on *Meloidogyne* and other nematode. The lectures presented by world experts resulted in the two-volume set "*An Advanced Treatise on Meloidogyne*". These books and other publications by Dr. Sasser and Associates contributed immeasurably to nematology around the world. The International *Meloidogyne* Project was one of USAID's most successful efforts.

Dr. Sasser's contributions to nematology and agriculture brought him many honors. These include the Oliver Max Gardner award, a statewide University of North Carolina award for contributions to higher education and service to humanity and honorary memberships in two nematology societies – "Society of Nematologists" and "Organization of Nematologists of Tropical America". He also was the first Vice-President and the second President of the Society of Nematologists. Dr. Sasser retired in 1989, after 36 years of research and service. He still continued to live a full life during the ensuing 16 years. Whether at his retirement home, a Society of Nematology meeting, an NC State *Emeriti* luncheon or another activity, Joe's presence, sharp mind, wit and charm added much to the success of the day. His pride in his large family and the achievements of his many former graduate students and colleagues undoubtedly helped him sustain an intense interest in life, including nematology, until his sudden departure from life on August 17th. May God Almighty bless his soul.

Dr. K.R. Barker
Dr. A. Ghaffar