

Robert Charles Cetas, 1922–1979

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Robert Charles Cetas, Professor of Plant Pathology, passed away June 14, 1979, in Riverhead, New York, after being associated with Cornell University for 32 years as graduate student, assistant, associate, and full professor and emeritus professor.

He was born February 23, 1922, in Harbor Springs, Michigan. Following 3 years of service in the army (1942–1946) he returned to undergraduate studies at Michigan State University and graduated with a BS in agriculture in 1947. He then matriculated at

Cornell University as a PhD candidate in plant pathology and, during the period 1947–1952, was responsible for potato pathology work on Long Island. He worked on the potato “A” virus problem and was awarded the PhD in 1952. On July 1, 1952, he was appointed assistant professor of plant pathology and began work at the Long Island Vegetable Research Station near Riverhead. He succeeded Howe Cunningham who had held that post for many years. Bob was promoted to associate professor in 1956 and professor in 1971, a position held until his early retirement on June 11, 1979. On that date he was granted professor emeritus status by the Cornell University Board of Trustees.

Although research was his major assignment at the station, he frequently became involved in extension activities such as identifying potato and vegetable diseases, speaking at meetings, and writing for county publications. He was a constant field trial cooperater with Ithaca-based Cornell specialists and his readiness to help with vegetable disease problems was always appreciated by farmers, county agents, agribusinessmen, and colleagues. During his long association with Cornell, Bob conducted experiments on the control of late blight, scab, *Rhizoctonia*, *Verticillium* wilt, leaf roll, black leg, black spot, nematode root rot, and ring rot of potatoes. He also worked on black rot, black leg, wirestem, and downy mildew of cabbage and cauliflower, damping-off of spinach, blotch of onions, and several other vegetable diseases. He was a leader of a long-term project involving the screening and evaluation of new potato fungicides, which included studying efficacy, phytotoxicity, dosage, and spray schedules of these fungicides. Potato seedpiece treatments received much of his attention in recent years. His research has resulted in potato fungicide and nematicide registrations of critical value to Long Island farmers. He authored or co-authored over 140 papers during his career.

Dr. Cetas was an active participant in many scientific and

professional organizations. He served on a number of committees of the American Phytopathological Society and the Potato Association of America. He was a frequent contributor of scientific papers to the publications of these organizations and was a member of the editorial board of the APS publication, “Fungicide and Nematicide Tests.” At the time of his death he was preparing a paper for presentation at the IXth Congress of Plant Protection in Washington, DC to present research results that could lead to a breakthrough in controlling late blight, one of the most devastating diseases of potatoes. He also made significant contributions to the Council for Agricultural Science and Technology as a member of a special Task Force studying the uses of energy in agriculture. He participated with other pathologists in gathering statistics and data for appraisal by the Environmental Protection Agency of a fungicide in worldwide use.

Dr. Cetas was a member of Sigma Xi since 1952 and was a long-time member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the American Institute of Biological Sciences. He also was affiliated with the Society of Nematologists, International Society of Plant Pathologists, the Pesticide Association of New York State, and the American Society for Testing and Materials. He was elected a member of the New York Academy of Sciences in 1972.

Dr. Cetas’ most significant contributions have been of most value to the farmers and agribusinessmen of Long Island. The results of his research are being used in disease control practices of the vegetable and potato growers in that area and throughout New York State. His knowledge of food production was very broad and thus his opinions and advice were sought by many farmers. He was highly respected by his peers in the science of plant pathology. Testimony to the esteem in which he was held was tendered on the occasion of his retirement. Plaques were presented by the Alumni Association of the Cornell College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, the Long Island Farm Bureau, the Long Island Agricultural Marketing Association, the Cooperative Extension Association of Suffolk County, and the Pesticide Association of New York State.

He was a very devoted and loving husband and father. He dedicated his life to his family, his church, and his profession. Soon after he and his wife moved to Riverhead, they started a Bible study class in their home. From that beginning developed the Calvary Baptist Church of Riverhead. Over the years Bob served his church as Sunday school teacher, deacon, trustee, and chairman of the building committee. He is survived by his wife, Henrietta, and son, Charles, of Riverhead, New York, and daughter, Cheryl, of Montgomery, Alabama.