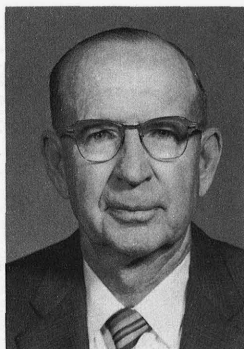


John O. Gaskill, 1908-1981

E. G. Ruppel and R. J. Hecker



He was quiet and unassuming, always a gentleman and a gentle man, but he also was a meticulous, accurate scientist who searched for the most minute details of every research problem. Such a man was John O. Gaskill, retired plant pathologist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, who died December 10, 1981, after an extended illness. He is survived by his wife Margret; four sons, J. Richard of Los Gatos, CA, Jack of Tucson, AZ, Robert of Clarksville, MD, William of Los Alamos, NM; two brothers,

William and Joseph of Wilcox, AZ; and nine granddaughters.

Mr. Gaskill was born March 24, 1908, in Salisbury, NC. His mother's poor health prompted the family to move to the drier climate of Deming, New Mexico, where John completed his early education. It was on the family farm near Deming that he became interested in diseases affecting his father's crops and, in 1929, he earned a bachelor's degree from New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts (New Mexico State University), specializing in plant pathology.

After graduation, Mr. Gaskill began his long and productive career in sugar beet research with the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Fort Collins, CO, with a brief assignment in Rocky Ford, CO. While on a 1-year leave from his federal position, he married Margret Rucker on December 24, 1931, and earned a master's degree in plant pathology at Iowa State University in 1932. He also completed additional graduate course work in plant breeding and genetics at the University of Minnesota, and at Colorado State University where he was an affiliate faculty member in the botany and plant pathology department and a member of the graduate faculty. Before retirement on May 31, 1971, he served as head of the Sugar Beet Production Unit of the Agricultural Research Service at the U.S. Department of Agriculture Crops Research Laboratory in Fort Collins. His entire career was spent in Colorado as a research plant pathologist, except for a 16-month assignment as a plant breeder in East Lansing, MI, from 1947 to 1948.

Mr. Gaskill attained an international reputation for research on sugar beet flowering, and in the development of disease-resistant germ plasm. In the former work, he established the separate effects

of temperature and light on the photothermal induction of flowering in seedlings of biennial sugar beet. With this valuable tool, breeders were able to reduce the life cycle of beet from 2 years to 6 months. In disease resistance breeding, he is noted for the release of several germ plasms having resistance to *Cercospora beticola* (leaf spot) and *Rhizoctonia solani* (root rot) and also developed lines having combined resistance to leaf spot, root rot, and the curly top virus. He has authored or coauthored more than 90 scientific publications.

The search for resistance to *R. solani* was particularly challenging, and epitomizes Mr. Gaskill's meticulous and tireless approach to difficult problems. Formerly, all attempts to create artificial epiphytotics suitable for differentiating low levels of resistance were unsuccessful because the pathogen devastated all breeding materials. Thus, with V. G. Pierson, exacting techniques were worked out that permitted meaningful field evaluations for resistance. Two breeding lines with relatively high levels of resistance that evolved from this work represent the only proven sources of *Rhizoctonia*-resistant sugar beet germ plasm in the world.

Less than 1 month after he retired, Mr. Gaskill was appointed as a collaborator with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and he also became a consultant to the Beet Sugar Development Foundation and led the research on the devastating yellow wilt disease of sugar beet in Chile and Argentina. Under his direction, the mycoplasma-like etiology of the disease was elucidated, and several resistant sugar beet selections were made.

Mr. Gaskill was a member of the American Phytopathological Society, the American Society of Sugar Beet Technologists, Sigma Xi, and Phi Kappa Phi. He received both the 40-yr Veteran and Meritorious Service awards from the American Society of Sugar Beet Technologists. Aside from professional societies, he was a long-standing member of the Rotary Club, the Century Club of the Boy Scouts of America, and the Community Church of the Rockies.

Mr. Gaskill was a humble man of unquestionable integrity and a sincere devotion to scientific principles and the search for truth. He commanded the respect of all who knew him, and he in turn treated everyone with respect. He will be sorely missed by his family, a multitude of friends, and his professional colleagues. It has been a rewarding privilege for all who have known and been associated with him.