

Harold W. Bockstahler, 1906–1987

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Harold W. Bockstahler (Bocky), a long-time employee of the United States Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, died of a stroke in Bloomington, Indiana, on 10 July 1987 at the age of 80. Although he retired from the U.S.D.A. in 1963 after 38 years of service, he resumed employment as a plant disease specialist in the Extension Plant Disease Diagnostic Clinic, Department of Botany and Plant Pathology, Michigan State University, retaining this position until 1973.

He and Mrs. Bockstahler then moved to Nashville, Indiana, to spend the remainder of their retirement years.

“Bocky” was born in Boonville, Indiana, on 27 September 1906, the son of Rev. William J. G. and Julia Raber Bockstahler. He married Evangeline C. Roth in Indianapolis on May 18, 1929. Besides his wife, he is survived by his son, Dr. Larry Bockstahler, biophysicist, Public Health Service, Rockville, Maryland, and his family.

After graduating from Central High School, Evansville, Indiana, in 1924, he attended Purdue University, graduating with a B.S. degree in botany in 1928 and with an M.S. degree in plant pathology in 1930. He continued graduate study at The Ohio State University in 1942 until May 1944, then went on to the University of Minnesota, where he continued his studies in plant pathology the next four years with a minor in entomology.

His employment with the U.S.D.A. began while at Purdue University, first with the Bureau of Entomology (1925–1927) as a field scout for European Corn Borer Control, and from 1927–1930 as an agent, Bureau of Plant Industry, Cereal Disease Investigations. In 1930, he joined the U.S.D.A. Sugar Plant Investigations as a research plant pathologist, first at Arlington, Virginia, and a year later was transferred to Rocky Ford, Colorado. In 1940, he moved to Wooster, Ohio, then on to St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1944, and finally to East Lansing, Michigan, in

1948, where he headed up the U.S.D.A. Sugar Beet research program until his retirement on January 4, 1963.

During his early years on the sugar beet disease investigations, he worked closely with two outstanding sugar beet pathologists, Dr. G. H. Coons and Dr. J. E. Kotila. Many of their disease investigations were published jointly. His early research was directed toward the control of leaf spot and Fusarium yellows diseases of sugar beets. This included the development and selection of disease-resistant varieties through breeding and the production of seed from the superior plant strains. His investigations also included the effect of crop rotation and environmental factors on disease development. During this period, Bocky was the leader in developing several machines for threshing and cleaning sugar beet seed from either individual or bulk lots of seed plants for seed increase and in setting up laboratories and equipment for sugar testing at field stations.

When Bocky moved to Wooster, Ohio, his research was directed towards the control of black root (*Phoma betae* Frank) and the leaf spot diseases of sugar beets in cooperation with the Ohio State Agricultural Experiment Station. He was involved with similar cooperative programs in Minnesota and Michigan. At each place he was involved in a cooperative breeding program for disease resistance. Under his direction, the U.S.D.A. program at Michigan State University was expanded to include a plant breeder and a plant physiologist. This team of specialists, in cooperation with researchers at Michigan State University, developed a highly successful cooperative research program. As a result, a number of black root-leaf spot resistant sugar beets were developed and released for commercial production.

Mr. Bockstahler was a member of the Theta Chi fraternity, Sigma XI, Thomas Say Entomological Society (served as its first president), American Society of Agronomy, American Society of Sugar Beet Technologists, Gamma Alpha Honor Society, and the American Phytopathological Society. He was also a member of local Rotary and Lions Clubs and the Brown County Historical Society. Bocky will long be remembered by his associates for his contributions to the sugar beet industry.