

Opportunities, Challenges, and Wrinkles in a Plant Breeding Career

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It was a fabulous honor to receive the National Association of Plant Breeders Impact Award in 2017, and to follow up with a presentation on thoughts on a career in plant breeding. Having grown up on a dairy/beef/row crop farm in Mississippi, it was quite a career stretch to ending up working in fruit breeding. As with all careers, there are usually several twists and turns, some anticipated and some not. My greatest opportunity came at the University of Arkansas working with my PhD advisor and subsequent colleague James N. Moore. Dr. Moore began the Arkansas fruit breeding program in 1964, I joined him in 1980, and assumed the program leadership up his retirement in 1996. The opportunity to carry out our program dreams has extended well beyond what I envisioned in my early career. One of the larger challenges was in the area of funding for the program. From the program's beginnings until the 1990s, state funding provided almost all the support. Arkansas has no organized fruit industry, and no industry support to parallel his substantial effort. This appeared to be an unsustainable for the program and my career, and I figured that program support must be attained in some way. This led to the embracing of intellectual property rights as a means to generate support. This has worked out more successfully than envisioned, and allowed me to grow professionally in an area that I had little to no interest. The IP expansion turned out to expand program income, academic scholarship, and the increased use of the program's genetic resources. There were also some unusual wrinkles along the way, and I will share further on those that I was able to smooth out, and those that continue to be worked out.