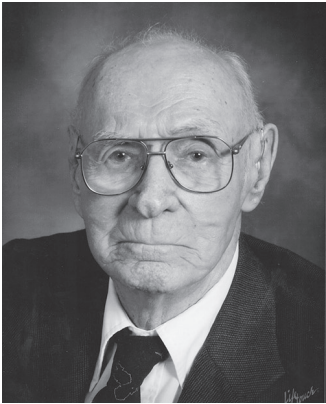


John Cooper



John Cooper was born on a small hillside farm in Gilmer County in 1919 and spent the bulk of the Great Depression in Glenville. He graduated from Glenville High School in 1936 and attended Glenville State College before transferring to West Virginia University in 1938. There, he was a member of the Alpha Zeta Agricultural Honorary and the Phi Epsilon Phi Botanical Honorary. He graduated in 1940 with a degree in agriculture and began work in Taylor County with the Farm Security Administration, the forerunner of the Farmers Home Administration (FHA). In 1942, he volunteered for duty in the U.S. Navy and served on the battleship *New Jersey* in the Pacific Theater.

Following his honorable discharge in 1945, Mr. Cooper resumed employment with the FHA in Beckley, but soon took a job with the U.S. Soil Conservation Service (SCS), which assigned him to Roane County. It was in Roane County where he truly began his lifelong campaign to help farmers use better conservation practices to reduce soil erosion on abandoned farmlands. Under his guidance, thousands of tree seedlings were planted in Roane and Mason County, where he was transferred to in 1965.

He was always searching for innovative methods to improve SCS programs. He was the first person to design and supervise construction of hilltop ponds using diversion ditches as the water source. He designed a siphon overflow from a pond to supply watering troughs. Under his direction, an enormous 20,000-foot tile drainage system was installed on a Mason County farm.

Mr. Cooper was designated as trainer for newly hired agents and he tutored 12 new professionals during his SCS career. He was also state president of the Soil Conservation Society in 1975. He eventually became interested in Christmas tree production as a source of additional income for farmers. He raised his first trees on a friend's farm near Spencer, W.Va. In 1972, he bought an abandoned farm and in 1973, Santa's Forest was christened. He retired from SCS in 1979 to devote his time to improving and expanding Santa's Forest.

He is a member of the W.Va. Christmas Tree Growers Association (WVCTGA) and National Christmas Tree Association (NCTA). He was the WVCTGA representative at the NCTA meeting three years and served as president of the WVCTGA in 1979. He hosted the WVCTGA summer meeting in 1979 and 1994, and has always been known to willingly share his knowledge and expertise with fellow growers. He presented trees from Santa's Forest to three West Virginia governors, and represented the WVCTGA in 1979 when Eric and Gloria Sundbeck presented a West Virginia tree to the White House during the Carter administration.

He was recognized for having the 1993 Conservation Farm of the Year in Mason County, he taught conservation at 4-H camps, volunteered for the American Red Cross and worked as a merit badge counselor and Cub Scout leader in Roane County. He was known for his writing and photography skills, and twice had articles published in *Goldenseal* magazine.