

Dr. Robert James Young



Dr. Robert James Young was born September 24, 1931 in Hubart, Indiana. He was a member of the U.S. Air Force from 1952 to 1955, he trained K9 dogs in Japan and Korea. He was honorably discharged in 1955. He received his B.A. degree in Biology from Ottawa University in June, 1959. He received his Ph.D. in Botany from Oregon State in 1963. Between 1963 and 1966, he worked with the USDA-ARS Colorado on potato projects. In 1966, he was transferred to the USDA-ARS Crops Research Division, Department of Botany & Plant Pathology, with University of Maine. He was introduced to West Virginia University through this position and collaboration. He worked with potatoes and tomatoes in the Division of Plant and Soil Sciences. In 1970, WVU offered him a position. He became an associate professor in May 1975 and became a full-time professor in 1982.

During his time at WVU, he was not just a professor, but also a researcher. He helped many graduate students and authored numerous articles on potato diseases. He continued working with the University of Maine and Cornell University in the development of potato seed trials. He was also involved with the Potato Pest Management Committee for the Northeastern region and a member of NE 107, a potato research project, for 15 years.

In 1993, he was invited to Maine to address potato tuber rot caused by late blight. He participated in a science exchange program between the USDA, Mexico, and WVU. He traveled to Toluca Valley, Mexico, to study late blight through an all-expense paid trip sponsored by the USDA. He received numerous grants from the USDA-ARS and Dupont.

Aside from his professional life, he was involved in many community service activities. He was a member of the First Baptist Church where he was involved in the "Circle of Friends," an outreach program in which the group would take turns preparing meals for the homeless in the Morgantown area. He also served as a judge at the Nicholas County Potato Festival for 21 years. The local Lions Club once said, "They were as proud of him as they were of the WVU football team!"

In 1993, he retired from WVU, but continued to work with USDA evaluating potato varieties. He continued this work because it was what he loved and he was confident it provided value to WV growers. At the age of 84, he was still harvesting and evaluating potatoes, supporting soup kitchens, and doing volunteer work. He was looking forward to continuing his work in 2016 when he passed away.

