

**Friends of Agricultural Research-Beltsville, Inc.  
PO Box 1061, Beltsville, MD 20704-1061**

**Dedicated to promoting the research and education programs of the  
Henry A. Wallace Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, Beltsville, MD**

# **THE FAR-B NEWS**

*January 2008*

*Editor: Hank Becker*

## **President's Message**

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Reading this first of the 2008 Newsletters will clearly show that 2007 was a very active and productive year for FAR-B, especially in outreach and direct support to BARC. However, 2008 may be an even more challenging year for FAR-B because of the very difficult financial environment that the Area faces.

Although many research units have been significantly improved from the redirections and reorganizations carried out at BARC this past year, the federal budget outlook for FY 08 and 09 may negate some of these gains. FAR-B, however, will make every effort to support and assist BARC, with both financial and public communication efforts. Chief among these will be helping the new National Agricultural Research Alliance-Beltsville ("BARC Alliance") to understand the organization, culture and needs of BARC and its employees. This help will assist the Alliance in developing a strategy for gaining support for BARC from state and local government agencies, the private sector, and other stakeholders. FAR-B has the unique ability to be an important resource of information and advice to the Alliance because it can easily call on a large membership that has very many BARC "veterans" with vast experience at BARC.

I want also to take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude to Phyllis Johnson and Ron Korcak who have so capably led BARC through some very

difficult time these past 11 years--a record tenure! Their vision, energy and imaginative efforts have resulted in many important firsts, and their legacy will always be important to BARC. On behalf of FAR-B, I want to wish them both our fondest wishes for every success and happiness as they enter new stages of their great careers. FAR-B could not have had better partners in our shared goal to ensure BARC sustains its scientific preeminence.

Several Board Members have resigned because of other activities and obligations. FAR-B thanks the following members for their service and contributions to FAR-B: Nancy Thrush, Morton Beroza, Jim Smith, Ralph Bram and Bill Wergin. Their contributions and dedication to FAR-B and BARC will be greatly missed.

**K. Darwin Murrell**, *President*



## **FAR-B Poinsettias Plant Sale**

In 2007, FAR-B organized two plant (Behnkes mums and poinsettias) sales. Notices were sent out to all FAR-B members and to BARC employees in

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August for the mums and both in August and late October for the poinsettias. Pick-up was held in the National Visitor Center. The mums were sold for \$8.00 each and 60 plants were sold. The poinsettias were sold for \$13.00 each and 111 plants were sold.

These sales resulted in \$807 in income to FAR-B. The money collected from the poinsettias has gone into the FAR-B travel fund for BARC scientists.

In 2008, FAR-B hopes to hold its third poinsettia sale and will announce this in August 2008. Notices are going out early so as not to conflict with the Combined Federal Campaign. Many thanks to all of you who supported the plant sale.

**Freddi Hammerschlag**, *Fundraising Chair*

### **Area Director's Report**

Happy New Year to everyone! This is the time of year when people are usually thinking about "ringing in the new" and "out with the old." Well this is a very timely refrain for the Beltsville Area in 2008. Back in mid-November Dr. Ron Korcak, Associate Area Director, and myself were presented with directed reassignments from our current positions. I was assigned to become the Area Director for the Pacific West Area and Ron was offered the Area Director position in the North Atlantic Area. Both of these Area Director positions had recently become vacated.

Ron has opted to retire from federal service. His last day on the job will be February 15, 2008. We wish him well in his future endeavors.

As of February 17, 2008, Dr. Joe Spence will be the new Area Director for BARC. Joe is currently the Deputy Administrator on the National Program Staff for Nutrition, Food Safety, and Quality. Joe also was the Director of the Beltsville

Human Nutrition Research Center before moving to the National Program Staff. Dr. Tom Sexton, currently the Director of the Animal and Natural Resources Institute in the Beltsville Area, will be the new Associate Area Director.

This is also the time of year when expectations about the new FY09 federal budget mount. The President's budget is released to the public on the first Monday of February. In fact, we just received the final FY08 appropriations for the Beltsville Area. As you might be aware of, there was an across the board reduction of about 0.7 percent for the Agency. This amounts to about \$912,000 for the Beltsville Area. Additionally, the 2008 4.5 percent pay raise will also have to be covered by existing funds. These actions will present management challenges.

Going back to the FY09 budget, the outlook is that we will face some additional budgetary challenges but any specifics are unknown at this point.

Another transition was the retirement of our Deputy Area Director, Mr. Robert Serrano. Bob will be missed but we wish him all the best in his retirement plans. Mr. Archie Tucker, who is currently the Deputy Area Director for the Mid South Area, has started a 2-month detail as the Acting Deputy Area Director for the Beltsville Area. Archie has over 33 years of Federal Service with ARS and has worked as a Biological Laboratory Technician, Area Property Management Officer and Area Administrative Officer. We hope to complete the hiring of a new Deputy Area Director within the next 2 months.

Lastly, both Ron and I would like to express our sincere appreciation to the members of FAR-B and especially the FAR-B Board of Directors for their unflinching support of the Beltsville Area.

**Phyllis Johnson**, *Director*

## **CFC Contributions Slow**

Contact with our people involved with the Combined Federal Campaign suggests that contributions are very slow this year. They anticipate their planned goal will only reach 56 percent of their original target, which was one of the lowest amounts collected in several years.

FAR-B made a concerted effort to contact as many BARC scientists during the 2007 campaign. Vern Pursel and I mailed out over 300 fliers directly to everyone in our scientific community. Unless there is a late surge of contributions, FAR-B will receive one of the lowest contributions in the past several years. CFC funds play an important role in our annual budget plans. We will need to closely examine each program we anticipated funding in 2008. Our FAR-B members want to thank everyone who pledged funds to our programs.

**Phil Kearney**, *CFC Chair*

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## **Financial Report**

Once again FAR-B turned to financial reserves this year to cover the Professional Travel Grant of \$20,000 allocated to the three BARC institutes according to their number of SY's. On the income side of the balance sheet, the funds received through CFC contributions in 2007 were \$1,800 above the previous year.

In an effort to help FAR-B remain financially sound, the Board of Directors has voted to increase Personal Membership dues to \$30 and increase Associate Membership dues to \$15. This is the first increase in membership dues since FAR-B was founded in 1985.

**Vern Pursel**, *Treasurer*

## **Community Outreach**

FAR-B members, in partnership with BARC scientists, are gearing up for their fifth year of providing a science enrichment program for Beltsville Elementary School (BES). This year's program, "Exploring Environmental Science," will be held April 15 to 17 in the school's gymnasium. All students in grades 1 to 6 will participate.

This program takes a great effort by FAR-B members and by BARC, NAL and ARS Information Staff employee's. In recognition of the hours spent on this project last year, FAR-B received The President's Gold Medal Volunteer Service Award for 2007 presented by the President's Council on Service and Civic Participation. This was the third year in a row that FAR-B has been recognized.

**Dianne Odland**, *Liaison, ARS Information Staff*

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## **Membership Update**

As several articles in this issue of the newsletter indicate, the need for a strong Friends group to support BARC, and its employees and programs has never been greater. FAR-B currently has 174 members, including 20 Patrons, 78 Personal members and 76 Associate members. To maintain and hopefully increase our membership, we regularly attempt to contact retirees and former and current BARC employees to urge them to join our group. However, our efforts are often hampered by the lack of names and/or contact information of many past BARC employees, and the apathy of others.

Thus, we would welcome the help of everyone who reads this newsletter in getting the word out to former colleagues -- or other interested parties that you have contact with -- about FAR-B's activities and encourage them to become members. The Membership Directory that

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we published in January 2007 is still reasonably accurate, but if you wish to get in touch with me concerning possible new members, please do so.

Finally, at our January Board of Directors meeting we voted to increase the annual cost of Personal membership to \$30 (still less than the cost of a tank of gas) and the cost of Associate Membership to \$15. This was the first increase in FAR-B dues since the organization was formed in the early 1980's.

**Allan Stoner**, *Membership Chair*

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## **National Visitor Center Says Farewell to Jeanette Baylor**

Jeanette Baylor, Information Specialist, retired on January 3, 2008 after 37 years of Federal service, 26 years of which was with ARS. Her last day was December 14, 2007.

Jeanette began her Federal career in 1961, and she came to the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center in 1982 to work for BARC, which became the ARS National Visitor Center (NVC) in 1986. Two years later, the NVC was relocated to its present home in the Log Lodge. Jeanette began coordinating programs for domestic and international visitors in 1997.

Jeanette will be moving in January to Owings, Md. where she plans to spend time traveling, writing, volunteering for FAR-B, and eventually starting a part time business.

While we wish her well in this next chapter, she will be greatly missed. In her time at ARS, Jeanette has created a wonderful foundation and example on which to continue and grow ARS visitor programs.

**Jennifer Woodward-Greene**,  
*Director National Visitors Center*

## **Security Services at the National Visitor Center**

The National Visitor Center (NVC) staff can no longer provide routine security services for BARC due to staff reductions over the past year. The NVC staff struggled to maintain this service as long as possible. After several weeks of closure this winter due to staffing issues, NVC Director Jennifer Woodward-Greene and BARC Security Officer Dan Thessen developed a plan to reliably cover security for the East side.

As of Jan. 2, BARC Security Services took over the security duties at the NVC. Denise Brome, security contractor, is performing this function at the NVC, which includes checking in routine visitors, and dealing with delivery and service personnel. If Denise is absent, the contractor will have a replacement for her automatically. Denise continues her prior responsibilities for issuing parking permits and clearance for foreign visitors.

This arrangement allows the NVC staff to focus on visitor program development, and enables the National Visitor Center to remain open to the public for regular hours--8:30 am to 4:00 pm.

**Jennifer Woodward-Greene**,  
*Director National Visitors Center*

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## **IN MEMORIAM**

### **William A. Bruce**

Bill Bruce passed away on Wednesday, March 7, 2007 in Columbia, Md. He was 65. Bill was born in Burlington, Vt. and attended undergraduate school at St. Lawrence University in NY. He received his Masters and Ph.D. degrees from The Ohio State University.

After a short post-doctoral period at the University of Florida, he was hired as a Research Acarologist by the USDA. He worked for several years at the Stored

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Products Insects Laboratory in Savannah, Ga. In 1989, Bill moved to Maryland where he worked for several years at the BARC in the Bee Research Lab. His tireless work ethic provided him with much expertise in rearing and studying many species of mites that are economically important to agriculture. He was well-known and respected internationally in his field. He retired in June 1997 after 26 years of service.

### **Robert Franklin Whitcomb**

Robert Franklin Whitcomb, 75, a research entomologist at BARC, identified more than 50 new species of leafhoppers and about 60 new species of microorganisms, died of brain cancer Dec. 21 in Sierra Vista, Ariz. He lived in Sonoita, Ariz.

Dr. Whitcomb was known worldwide for his 1972 discovery of the genus *Spiroplasma* -- a group of small bacteria without cell walls. *Spiroplasma* may be the largest genus of any kind on earth and may contain more than a million species. He worked on these microorganisms for the rest of his career.

He also was deeply interested in birds, and one of his articles, which applied the ideas of island biogeography to mainland bird populations in the eastern deciduous forest, was considered a landmark study. It led to the current emphasis on the negative effects of forest fragmentation on biota -- all living organisms of the forest.

At BARC, Dr. Whitcomb was widely credited with the successful re-creation of its grasslands, a unique landscape in the Washington area that contains the progeny of plants seeded in Colonial times or before.

Born in New York City, Dr. Whitcomb graduated from Blackburn College in Carlinville, Ill., and received a master's degree in entomology in 1958 and a doctorate in plant pathology in 1961--both from the University of Illinois. He did postdoctoral work in entomology at the

University of California at Berkeley for five years. He moved to the Washington area in 1966 to work at Beltsville, where he remained for the next 30 years.

He was an original member of the International Organization for Mycoplasmaology in 1974 and taught one of its methods courses in Bordeaux, France, in 1984. He published more than 300 scientific papers and in 1979 was one of four editors of a new series of scientific reference books, *The Mycoplasmas*.

### **Alice Fulton Skelsey**

Alice Fulton Skelsey, 81, an author of seven books and a USDA official, died of respiratory failure Nov. 13 at her home in Annandale.

Mrs. Skelsey's first work, *The Working Mother's Guide to Her Home, Her Family and Herself* (1970) advised back-to-the-office mothers not to wait to be asked to help at school, but to be honest about what they couldn't do.

She worked for the USDA for 35 years -- as a magazine and feature writer for ARS, then as director of information for BARC and in 1978 as director of information for Science and Education at USDA.

She was a speechwriter for Cabinet-level officers and worked on Lady Bird Johnson's beautification efforts in the 1960s. Mrs. Skelsey also organized special events for Nancy Reagan at the National Arboretum and worked in Russia and China on projects with the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Mrs. Skelsey retired from the government in 1982 to form an editorial consulting business that specialized in international development in food, agriculture and economic cooperation.

Born Alice Catherine Fulton in Tulsa, Okla., she attended the University of Tulsa and graduated from the University of Colorado. She moved to New York City in the late 1940s to work as a magazine

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writer and joined the USDA in 1950 as a radio and TV specialist for its information office. She appeared on WRC-TV (Channel 4) hosting a 13-week Saturday morning show for teenagers.

### **Bob Stewart**

Dr. Robert N. Stewart who was research geneticist at the BARC died on August 28 at his Beltsville home of 57 years.

In the 1950s, Dr. Stewart became enamored with the prospect of improving poinsettias. He looked for ways to extend what he called "keeping quality" -- that is, lengthening the time that poinsettias would retain their attractive appearance. Then poinsettia plants were beautiful when they left the greenhouse, but quickly lost their attractiveness in non-greenhouse settings.

Before he was through, Stewart would change the face of an industry forever. He would open the way for a once prohibitively expensive specialty plant to become the Christmas Season occupant of virtually every household, office building, and church in the land. According to a government report, the annual wholesale value of potted poinsettias sold in the United States had grown from \$9 million in 1950 to over \$250 million in 2003.

Dr. Stewart was a sustaining member of FAR-B. He was 90.

### **Steven C. King**

Steven C. King, 85, formerly of Gaithersburg, Md. died on Oct. 26, 2007. He was a personal member of FAR-B.

Dr. King was born on December 12, 1921, graduated from the University of New Hampshire, and received his doctoral degree from Cornell University. Before coming to ARS, he worked for Hubbard Farms in Walpole, NH. At ARS, he was an administrative executive with the USDA for 26 years. He was the Branch Chief for

the Poultry Branch and later he became Assistant Director of Poultry Research under Ralph Hodgson who was the Director for Animal Husbandry. In 1972 King retired from the USDA.

After retiring from the government he started Solar King, an early solar energy company he developed from a project building and designing his own solar heated swimming pool. He later became a realtor in Montgomery County and sold real estate for 14 years until he retired at age 79.

He authored seven books during retirement including *Flying the Hump to China* which recounts his wartime experiences. *Why Are We Here?* explores the philosophy of various religions and science-based theories in answering this question. *Seeds of War* examines the causes of war and our present day world conflicts. His last book *Living with Terrorism* examines the roots of terrorism, the history of Islam, and his hopes that a better understanding of the differences in religions and cultures will help towards world peace.

### **Dale R. Waldo**

Dale R. Waldo, a dairy research scientist at BARC from 1957 until his retirement in 1992, died December 4, 2007 in Chambersburg, Pa. after a long struggle with Alzheimer's disease. Dale was born on September 20, 1929 in Eau Claire, Mich. and is survived by his loving wife of 51 years.

Dale received his undergraduate degree from Michigan State University and his Ph.D. in animal nutrition from Cornell University. Dale's scientific contributions pertained to dietary influences on heifer growth and body composition, nitrogen metabolism, and the formulation and utilization of forage-based diets. Dale was the first scientist to propose the use of kinetic models to describe forage cell wall digestion. This model, published in 1972,

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has received more than 220 publication citations and still continues to be cited more than 35 years later.

As a scientist, Dale was known for meticulously conducting his experiments, taking care to reduce experimental error through a combination of precise measurements, selection of the appropriate quality and quantity of animals, and rigorous statistical methodologies.

### **John Francis Kucharski**

John Francis Kucharski, formerly of Hyattsville, Md., died Wednesday in Scranton, Pa. after a long illness complicated by Agent Orange. He was 63. He was a sustaining member of FAR-B.

John was born in Worcester, Mass. on October 27, 1943. John then went on to graduate from the Brook's Institute of Photography, Santa Barbara, Ca. He enlisted in the United States Air Force and served two tours in Vietnam from 1966 to 1968 as a Combat Photographer. John left the Air Force after returning as a decorated combat Veteran.

John worked for the USDA for 36 years. During that time, John worked throughout the USDA serving in the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service and as the head of the ARS Information Staff Photography Unit. John spent time on assignments around the world, including extensive periods in Mexico and South America. At the time of his retirement on January 3, 2006, John was the Director of the National Visitor Center in Beltsville, Md., where he worked with members of Senate and Congress and with ambassadors from many nations.

### **Charles F. Mischke**

Charles F. Mischke, 62, a retired USDA plant scientist who contributed to advances in plant science and who later

taught biology at Bowie State University, died Oct. 17.

Dr. Mischke, a resident of Beltsville, began working for USDA's ARS in 1981, specializing in weed science and molecular genetics. His efforts to develop high-performance liquid chromatography technology became a major tool in genetic engineering and contributed to advanced DNA analysis.

In the 1970s, while at the University of Arizona, he did work on plant pathways activated by chemicals used by gardeners and farmers. In 1984, Dr. Mischke was part of a team from the USDA and the National Institutes of Health that demonstrated that electrically charged atoms shuttle in and out of plant cells through tunnel-like structures called "ion channels." Previously unknown in plants, the NIH-USDA discovery was published in the journal *Science*.

Dr. Mischke was born in Dallas and graduated from Grinnell College in Iowa and enlisted in the Army. He served as an instructor at the U.S. Army Infantry School at Fort Benning, Ga., and attended Officer Candidate School. A combat in Vietnam and an adviser to the Vietnamese infantry, he was awarded the Bronze Star.

He next attended graduate school at the University of Arizona, where he received a Ph.D. in genetics in 1975. Early in his career, he held assistant professorships at various universities, including the State University of New York at Geneseo and Ohio Wesleyan University. He received a SUNY research fellowship and a National Science Foundation grant.

Dr. Mischke retired from the USDA in 1998. After rehabilitation from an earlier series of strokes, he returned to teaching in 2001. He remained at Bowie State University until last year. He also often served as a judge at elementary school science fairs in the Beltsville area. Survivors include his wife Sue Mischke, also a USDA scientist, of 34 years, of Beltsville.

***Friends of Agricultural Research-Beltsville, Inc.***

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**FIRST CLASS**

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