National Association for Plant Breeding
PRIVATE SECTOR PLANT BREEDING IMPACT AWARD 2024

MICHAEL HALL
Bayer Crop Science
Chesterfield MO

The 2024 recipient of the National Association for Plant Breeding Private Sector Plant Breeding Impact Award is Dr. Michael Hall, Bayer Crop Science, Chesterfield MO. This Award recognizes an individual whose accomplishments as a scientist in the private sector have had extraordinary impact in the field of plant breeding in areas such as germplasm development, cultivar release, technological innovation, and leadership.

As one colleague observes: “Mike Hall has brought innovative strategies, attention to detail and continual process improvement to plant breeding not only within the companies where he has served, but also for the breeding industry overall, positively impacting crop production around the world. He has excelled in both conventional and transgenic breeding programs. With his breeding expertise, leadership and research, he has allowed more corn to grow globally with fewer impacts on the earth. His work will lead the way in plant breeding for years to come, especially with a future of climate change.”

Hall’s career with Bayer Crop Science took him across six states and two countries, from the University of Illinois, to Purdue University, to a 40-year career in industry. He started as a student worker in Dr. Bob Lambert’s Maize Genetics Lab, and met breeding icons including Drs. John Dudley, D.E. Alexander, and George Sprague. He worked for Jacques Seed in the summer with Maynard Ochs, who had recently finished at the University of Illinois. At Purdue, his graduate advisor was Dr. Pete Bauman, an accomplished corn breeder. Upon completing his PhD, Mike was primed for a career in plant breeding.

In 1985 Hall joined DEKALB Pfizer Genetics as a corn breeder in Olivia, MN, and then moved to Spencer, IA in 1986. By 2001 he was the developer of 19 patented inbred lines, many of which were core to DEKALB’s portfolio. These inbreds were used in over 50 million units of commercial seed corn, 26% of branded sales. Several of these lines were key founders in subsequent breeding cycles.

As another colleague states: “Mike embraces a sense of possibility – how farming practices could evolve if corn was evolved. His unmatched enthusiasm for game-changing projects has gone a long way in sustaining those projects over hurdles that might have otherwise proven to be barriers.”

In the late 90’s, Hall shifted his focus to an emerging field. He moved to Illinois and co-led the Monsanto Trait Integration team to re-envision transgenic breeding. This enabled the rapid integration and evaluation of transgenics in elite germplasm. Concurrently, Mike was a core member of six development teams and contributed to the successful development of Monsanto’s first- and second-generation transgenic corn pipeline. In 2002 Mike returned to his breeding roots to lead germplasm breeders west of the Mississippi. He also relocated to St Louis in 2004.

In 2006 Mike moved to Switzerland, where he led the EMEA Corn Breeding effort, initiated systematic germplasm exchange, and jumpstarted Monsanto’s contribution to the WEMA project along with other initiatives. Since returning to St Louis in 2009, Mike has been in Plant Biotechnology working on transformative projects to optimize both breeding efforts and agricultural sustainability. He has been focusing on Short Stature Corn since 2016 when this trait was fully characterized. He also has been a champion of Science Communication and Climate Change within Bayer. Hall is a Senior Fellow since 2003 and a two-time Queeny Awards winner. He resides in Wildwood, MO with his spouse Jeanine and their four dogs.

In conclusion, another colleague notes: “Mike Hall’s impressive contributions to plant breeding represent only the beginning of his contributions to agriculture. By bridging traditional breeding and biotechnology, Mike’s insights have driven capturing the best of both worlds – the result being continued improvement of crops, particularly corn. Mike exemplifies the best in the industry.”

Dr. Michael Hall, Bayer Crop Science, the 2024 recipient of the Private Sector Plant Breeding Impact Award of the National Association for Plant Breeding, evaluating corn breeding plots.

Dr. Michael Hall, the 2024 recipient of the Private Sector Plant Breeding Impact Award of the National Association for Plant Breeding in one of his corn test plots.