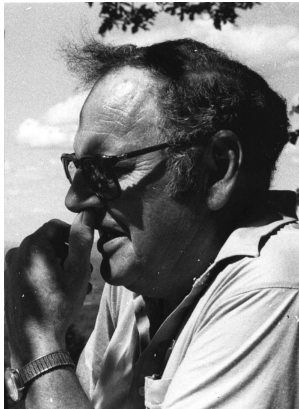

Obituary



J. Robert Smyth, Jr., Ph.D.

J. Robert “Bob” Smyth, Jr.

Dr. J. Robert “Bob” Smyth, Jr., 86 years, passed away on March 22, 2010, in Amherst, Massachusetts, USA. Smyth devoted his professional career to poultry research and education, and to extending scientific knowledge to poultry breeders in the industry who then applied that information to improve commercial poultry genetics. He received his B.S. degree in poultry science in 1945 from the University of Maine, where his father was a poultry genetics faculty member. Smyth earned his M.S. in 1947 and his Ph.D in 1949, both from Purdue University.

Smyth moved to the University of Massachusetts, and spent his 46-year professional career on the faculty there.

Smyth's research spanned from quantitative to molecular genetics of poultry. Early in his career, he developed specialized lines of turkeys. The Anderson turkey was a very large, white and cost-effective bird that enabled the establishment of a thriving turkey meat industry in the United States. Smyth introduced to the industry the wide usage of artificial insemination to enhance fertility in large lines of turkeys. He also developed the Midget White turkey, which is popularly used for small-scale, backyard production. Smyth was a world-renowned expert at classical, single-gene genetics of the fowl, especially allelic variation in colour of pigmented tissues such as down and feathers. His chapter on pigment genetics in the 1990 *Poultry Breeding and Genetics* book by Roy Crawford was one of the most oft-quoted publications on single-gene genetics of poultry. Smyth was known for his keen eye in detecting subtle variants in down and plumage colour and pattern, and for his tenacity in searching for the genetic origins of these mutations. One of his most important observations was the spontaneous appearance of a depigmenting disorder in the Massachusetts Brown Line of chickens. At an age when many university faculty consider retirement, Smyth established a chicken line exhibiting a high frequency of this auto-immune disease and initiated a new career direction in the study of this biomedical model. This research was supported by grants from the National Institutes of Health and the National Eye Institute, and included collaboration with physicians at Harvard University and Yale University. This chicken strain, now called the “Smyth line”, stands as the single well-recognized animal model for the human disorder, vitiligo, and research continues on it today.

Smyth enjoyed and excelled at teaching, including undergraduate, graduate and postdoctoral trainees. Over 36 students received M.S. or Ph.D. degrees or postdoctoral training with Smyth, including many prominent poultry geneticists in the industry and at universities. Smyth's outstanding contributions to teaching and to research in the poultry sciences were widely recognized by professional and scientific organizations. He was a rare individual who was applauded for both academic mentorship skills and research accomplishments, as well as his practical contributions to the poultry industry. The

Poultry Science Association awarded Smyth the Ralston Purina Teaching award in 1959, the Merck Award for Achievement in Poultry Science in 1985, and named him a Fellow of the association in 1990. He received the Research Award from the Breeders of America.

Smyth and his wife of 61 years, Ethyl Ann “Evvie”, successfully applied genetic principles to the breeding of cocker spaniels, significantly reducing the incidence of hereditary cataracts in the breed. In their four decades of operating Smytholm Kennels, they raised 20 champion dogs, including several that were best in breed or best in show. Champion Smytholm kennel dogs are found in many of the top cocker spaniel pedigrees today. Smyth was a respected judge at dog shows throughout the New England region of the US. He also enjoyed relaxing summer holiday times with his family on their island off the coast of Maine.

Despite many reasons to be proud of his accomplishments, Smyth was a very humble and accessible person, never collecting accolades for himself alone, but being generous in sharing credit for his work. Even after his official retirement, Smyth was often found in the classroom teaching, or at the hatchery of the Tillson Poultry Farm at the University of Massachusetts, looking for yet one more interesting genetic phenomenon in poultry. Smyth was preceded in death by his loving wife, Evvie, and is survived by four children. Smyth's legacy to poultry science continues in the form of the many academic and industry scientists who received their training with him, in the important scientific discoveries that he made, and the many valuable poultry genetic resources that he developed.