

Dear Colleagues:

I am deeply saddened to share news of the passing of Professor William “Bill” Roberts.

Bill retired from Rutgers in 1999 after a distinguished 41-year career as an extension specialist in bioresource engineering. His work and passion, to this day, leaves an indelible imprint across the globe in the form of the air-inflated, double-layer polyethylene greenhouse. This innovation, born in his basement on Christmas Day in 1964, quite literally revolutionized the greenhouse industry.

In 2004, the American Society for Agricultural and Biological Engineering dedicated the site of Professor Roberts’ air-inflated double-layer polyethylene greenhouse as an ASABE Historic Landmark. The dedication plaque reads:

A crucial step in the evolution of modern plant agriculture was the development of low-cost, energy-efficient greenhouse structures that provide optimum growing conditions year-round. In 1964, Professor William J. Roberts developed the first air-inflated double-layer polyethylene greenhouse covering system at Cook College, Rutgers University. Air-inflated double-layer polyethylene greenhouse covering systems were quickly and widely adopted throughout the United States and across the world, primarily due to the relatively low installation costs, adequate light transmission, and significant insulating properties. Today, more than half of all the greenhouses worldwide are covered with the air-inflated double-layer polyethylene covering system.

When asked about this revolutionary innovation, with unforced modesty, Bill would often reply “everyone has a good idea once in a while.”

In 2007, Bill received the SEBS and the NJAES “Lifetime Recognition of Distinguished Leadership” award. A few years later, in 2010, the New Jersey agricultural industry awarded Professor Roberts its highest honor, the New Jersey Agricultural Society’s Gold Medallion. The many in attendance that evening all rose in applause to honor a man graced with humility, humor, and a deep commitment to service.

Bill was a cherished friend and colleague to many, and he will be missed. Please keep Bill’s wife, Dottie, and daughter, Debbie, in your thoughts.