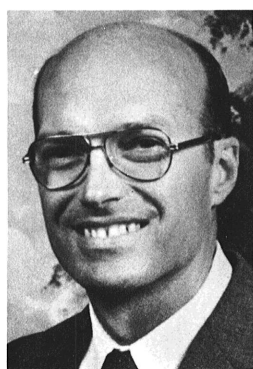


## Michael Thomas Turner, 1944–1987

R. E. Ford and Tim Leland



Dr. Michael T. Turner, former principal research scientist at Funk Seeds International, Bloomington, Illinois, died December 2, 1987 after several months of illness. His wife, Beth; a son, Scott Michael; a daughter, Staci Ann; and his father and stepmother, Mr. and Mrs. John Paul Turner, survive. Born 12 June 1944, in Powell, Wyoming, Mike obtained his B.S. in botany from Colorado State University in 1966, where he was a member of Phi Delta Theta, and his M.S. degree in plant

pathology from Cornell University in 1968. Mike served as a Marine, then received a Ph.D. in 1972 from Iowa State University based on his dissertation, *The Effect of Helminthosporium maydis Race T Toxin in Zea mays Leaves*. He developed one of the first effective bioassays for Race T resistance in *H. maydis*. His honors included Gamma Sigma Delta, Phi Kappa Phi, Beta Beta Beta, Lancers, and Outstanding Sophomore ROTC Cadet.

Dr. Turner's expertise in diseases of hybrid corn diseases led him to join Funk Seeds as assistant research scientist. Mike immediately organized and expanded a plant pathology department and laboratory to serve corn, sorghum, soybean, and wheat breeding programs. His innovative ability to reduce a problem to the least common denominator was evident in developing screening techniques for important pathogens—applicable to large-scale field conditions. He designed and built a mechanical, tractor-pulled virus/bacterial inoculator for six-row uniform inoculations of 20–40 acres per day. Mike established a plant disease diagnostic facility including electrophoresis and fingerprinting to monitor pathogens in the corn belt and to process inquiries from research, marketing, production, and customers.

During the development and maturity of integrated pest management (IPM) he was at ease and knowledgeable at professional society meetings relating to chemistry, genetics, entomology, soils, and agronomy. He naturally worked more widely than plant pathology because he had a broad vision from his upbringing on a Wyoming ranch. Mike understood clearly that the true integrator in IPM is the farmer. He was never too busy to solve problems if he knew the answer rather than referring the producer on to another specialist; likewise, he readily said, "I don't know," when he didn't. His breadth of interest was enhanced with undergraduate summer jobs in Alaska taking population counts of spawning king salmon and in Colorado and other states fighting forest fires.

Promoted to manage all pathology and entomology programs in 1978, Mike subsequently served in various research and administrative positions, the latest as principal research scientist in international technologies, an interdisciplinary group supporting Funk Seeds' international breeding programs. He worked closely with scientists at Funk's parent company, Ciba-Geigy, in evaluating experimental fungicides, herbicides, and insecticides and attended numerous conferences in the United States, Europe, and South America.

Besides initiating and shaping many of the research support programs, Mike maintained active involvement in plant pathology. He first reported in 1980 *H. turicum* race 2 in the U.S. corn belt. He served many committees in the American Phytopathological Society and chaired the Sustaining Associates,

Industry and Seed Borne Pathogens committees. He was associate editor of *Biological and Cultural Tests for Plant Disease Control*. He authored numerous scientific papers and was a reviewer for *Plant Disease and Phytopathology*. Other affiliations included the American Association of Plant Physiologists and the American Chemical Society. He published in Funk's journal *Up Front*, the name for which he was primarily responsible.

Dr. Turner's scientific and professional career was distinguished by thorough attention to detail, infectious enthusiasm, and an eye for practical applications of knowledge. His gift of putting new knowledge to work will benefit the hybrid corn industry for many years. He always considered being able to work in science a privilege.

Mike's talents were fitted perfectly for work in a competitive industry. He loyally maintained his company's confidentiality about proprietary germ plasms. His unending curiosity also made for a comfortable interface with the academic community. Cooperating freely, he had special research projects with universities in Iowa, Missouri, Illinois, and Indiana. Never satiated for knowledge, he used the library at University of Illinois regularly and stopped in to make professional visits with corn breeders and plant pathologists. Mike published his findings, although not a requirement for private employment. These were pleasant times for the university faculty because Mike's expert use of humor relaxed people, made friends, made his points, and made all our lives brighter. He presented several invited seminars, advising graduate students at the University of Illinois about the pros and cons of industry employment.

A natural teacher, he joined Illinois State University in 1974 as an adjunct associate professor and taught several undergraduate pathology courses. Unusually warm and sensitive, he recruited interested undergraduates for independent research projects within an industry setting. A genuine concern for the welfare of others reached beyond his professional and working relationships. A member of Our Savior Lutheran Church, he lived his faith and took on many added responsibilities in church and civic organizations. Above all and at the center of his life was his family.

Mike loved the outdoors and roamed the Wyoming hills ranch country where traditional American values were a way of life. You could depend on him. We quote the Rev. Dale Johnson, who eulogized Mike:

To most of us, Mike was a friend; a lovable guy with an easy-going manner, who had a sharp and subtle sense of humor that we grew to appreciate; enjoying his life and work in his quiet way; making few demands on others; always willing to do even more than his share. Mike was the kind of guy who made this world a better place for his being there. The long shadow he cast will be missed, but we will not soon forget the man he was.

Quiet, patient, and soft-spoken Mike was deeply committed to the issues of truth and integrity, so his vocation in research and science seemed natural. He wore well with time. Mike's earthly life was all too brief. With the gift of his mind, he helped make the world a better place.

To those who loved Mike, his family, and his friends, there remains the memory of a loving husband and father, and a kind and generous man. His contributions to Funk Seeds, the seed corn industry, and the field of phytopathology will continue to benefit even those who did not know him.