

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Cecil Nickell

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Agriculture in Illinois Oral History project

Interview # AI-A-L-2021-057

Cecil Nickell, a plant geneticist who performed pioneering work with soybean cultivars, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Agriculture in Illinois* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Date: Nov. 16, 2021

Location: Urbana, IL

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Craig Moots, ALPL volunteer

Transcription by: _____

Edited by: _____

Total Pages: _____ Total Time: 0:54 / 0.9 hrs.

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on December 28, 2021.

The interview is archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

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Transcript being
processed

Abstract

Cecil Nickell, *Agriculture in Illinois*, AI-A-L-2021-057

Biographical Information/Overview of Interview: Cecil Nickell was born on January 9, 1941 in Rochester, Indiana. Cecil grew up on a grain and livestock farm a few miles from Rochester and attended a rural school through the 8th grade and then Rochester High School. Interests in high school included basketball, FFA, and crop judging. After graduation from high school, he attended Purdue University, receiving a degree in Animal Science. Cecil continued his education at Michigan State University where he received M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in crop breeding and genetics while working in the winter barley breeding project.

Following graduation, Cecil accepted the position of Assistant and later Associate Professor of soybean breeding and genetics, Department of Agronomy, Kansas State University. This was a new position and the school obtained germplasm to start the breeding program from other public soybean breeding programs of similar maturities. Six soybean cultivars (a plant variety that has been produced in cultivation by selective breeding) were released during Cecil's time at KSU, and the Soybean Variety Testing Program was initiated to provide growers with information on new soybean cultivars sold in Kansas. The first Soybean Handbook was also developed to provide information on production, diseases, and marketing in Kansas.

In 1979 Cecil accepted a soybean breeding position in the Agronomy Department at the University of Illinois. Illinois provided much greater support for soybean breeding in terms of funding and also the number of potential collaborators working with soybean in areas of pathology, physiology, production and other related fields. In his time at Illinois, 28 cultivars were released that provided improved yield but also many with resistance to the soybean cyst nematode. The cultivars released at both universities were used by growers and widely used as parents by public and private breeders to develop new improved cultivars. Cecil believes the greatest impact his breeding programs achieved is through the mentoring and educating graduate students, 6 at Kansas State and 24 at Illinois. The newly trained scientists working in public and private research programs have contributed to the rise in yields and additional profits to growers.

Subject Headings/Key Words: Vocational Agriculture Education; FFA; crop rotation; Purdue University; Michigan State University; Kansas State University; University of Illinois; soybean germplasm; soybean cultivars; soybean disease; Phytophthora root rot; Brown stem rot; Soybean cyst nematode; Sudden Death Syndrome

Notes to the Reader: Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein. We leave these for the reader to judge.

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