

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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In Memoriam: Francis Kwong

Chris Beytes



Francis Kwong passed away July 30 after battling colon cancer. He was 65.

Francis was born in 1952 in southern China during the land reforms begun under Mao Zedong. He and his family left for Hong Kong, where he attended Catholic schools. In 1969, he came to the United States to pursue his interest in agriculture. After earning an undergraduate degree in agriculture from the University of Minnesota, he earned a master's degree from Oregon State University and a doctorate from Purdue.

Francis's first job in the industry was with Sluis & Groot in the Netherlands, working in vegetable seed production around the globe.

In 1986, he returned to the U.S. to join PanAmerican Seed, where he was tasked with setting up the company's first production research department. He led that effort for 30 years.

Said Anne Leventry, President of PanAmerican Seed, "He was absolutely key in working with all of our farms to help them to consistently produce high quality seed across an extremely wide and challenging group of products. He was the worldwide leader in his field in the flower seed industry." She added that Francis's combination of scientific brilliance and amazing creativity allowed him to solve seed production problems that others could not. He was instrumental in helping introduce many groundbreaking seed products, such as angelonia, calibrachoa and New Guinea impatiens.

"In many ways he was a pioneer in flower seed production," said Anna Ball in a tribute to Francis. "During his distinguished career, he made many discoveries and developed new processes for seed production that helped the whole industry."

Francis also had an interest philosophy and poetry. He spent hours reading Tennessee Williams, Walt Whitman, Greek classics and Adam Smith, among others, said his wife Jennifer (who also emigrated from China). "His curiosity was boundless, and the depth and breadth of his knowledge were phenomenal."

Anna summed up Francis best when she said, "He had the mind of a scientist and the soul of an artist." **GT**