

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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In Memoriam: Professor William J. “Bill” Roberts

Chris Beytes

If you've got a double poly greenhouse, you can thank Dr. Bill Roberts, the inventor of the technology back in 1964. Alas, Bill passed away peacefully May 21 after a brief hospitalization. He was 88.

Bill retired from Rutgers in 1999 after a 41-year career as an extension specialist in bioresource engineering, achieving well-deserved professor emeritus status. In 2004, the American Society for Agricultural and Biological Engineering (ASABE) dedicated the site of the still-standing first air-inflated, double-layer polyethylene greenhouse as an ASABE Historic Landmark. 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.

In 2014, for the 50th anniversary of the invention of double poly, we wrote about the milestone in GrowerTalks. His goal was to solve the problem of dripping condensation that plagued single-poly houses by creating an insulating effect with two layers of poly. That had been done before, but never with air, which was fast, easy and created a stronger, more rigid, yet flexible, covering. Kube-Pak in New Jersey, then owned by Aart Van Wingerden, patriarch of the famous horticulture family, was the first commercial grower to test the system. Today, it’s estimated that half of the world’s greenhouses are covered with double poly.

According to Rutgers’ Director of Extension, Brian Shilling, “When asked about this revolutionary innovation, with unforced modesty, Bill would often reply, ‘Everyone has a good idea once in a while.’” **GT**