

AMEGDA J. OVERMAN (1920-2011) PIONEER IN NEMATODE MANAGEMENT

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Amegda Overman in 1988, when she was awarded Honorary Membership in the Florida State Horticultural Society. (Photo courtesy of Florida State Horticultural Society.)

Amegda J. Overman, Professor Emeritus of the University of Florida, died on 13 February 2011, in Bradenton, Florida, USA, at age 90. She was born in Tampa, Florida, the daughter of Eloise Urquhart Smith Jack and Nicholas George Hatzakos Jack. She attended the University of Tampa and received her B.S. degree in 1942. Amegda received her M.S. degree from the University of Florida in 1951. In 1952, she married R. Douglas (Doug) Overman (1918-1998). In 1945, Amegda began work as a laboratory technician at the University of Florida Gulf Coast Research and Education Center in Bradenton. She progressed through the academic ranks and was promoted to Professor of Nematology in 1973. Amegda remained at the Gulf Coast Research and Education Center for 45 years, retiring in 1989.

Amegda is best known for her efforts in managing plant-parasitic nematodes on a wide range of crops, especially vegetables and ornamentals. She was a tireless worker who maintained a very active field research program at the Gulf Coast Research and Education Center

and in grower fields. She was dedicated to helping growers solve problems and developing methods for managing key pathogens like plant-parasitic nematodes and soil-borne fungi. She was a pioneer in the development of the full-bed, polyethylene mulch production system for vegetables and other commercial crops (Overman *et al.*, 1965). This system made Florida agriculture highly successful and productive, and it is still used today in Florida and many parts of the world. However, the system would not have been successful without Amegda's efforts to use soil fumigation to effectively manage complexes of *Meloidogyne* spp. and soilborne fungi such as *Verticillium* and *Fusarium*, which were devastating to key Florida vegetables such as tomato (Overman *et al.*, 1970). Amegda's efforts in nematode management were not limited to vegetables, as she also made important contributions in managing root-knot and other nematodes on key ornamental crops such as gladiolus, chrysanthemum, and caladium, and *Pratylenchus penetrans* on leatherleaf fern (*Polystichum adiantiforme*). Amegda also

pioneered in the application of soil fumigants through drip irrigation systems (Overman, 1976). Although especially well-known for her contributions to nematode management using soil fumigants, Amegda was involved in many other methods for nematode management as well, and conducted early field tests in Florida using summer cover crops (Overman *et al.*, 1971) and solarization (Overman, 1985).

Amegda was a charter member of ONTA and attended and presented papers at many of the early ONTA meetings. Her presentations were always of high quality and entertaining with bits of humor mixed in. She was very active in ONTA throughout her career and served as Secretary for 3 years, from 1971-73, as Vice President in 1974, and as President in 1975. Her presidential address at the ONTA meeting in St. Lucia in 1975 reflected her commitments to the importance of nematode management in helping with world food problems and to the importance of ONTA in keeping nematologists, who were relatively few in numbers, in touch with one another. Prior to the meeting, she visited nematologists at a number of the other Caribbean islands, discussing nematode management on many tropical crops, especially bananas and plantains. She received ONTA's Presidential Award in 1985, and the Honorary Member Award from ONTA at the Second International Congress of Nematology, held in the Netherlands in 1990.

Amegda's many accomplishments were appreciated and recognized by other scientific societies as well, and she gave great visibility to nematology in these organizations. She presented many papers at meetings of the Florida State Horticultural Society and was recognized with a Best Paper Award from this society on six different occasions. She served as Vice President of the Ornamental Section and was a member of the Public Relations Committee. In 1988, Amegda was elected an Honorary Member of the Florida State Horticultural Society. She also received an Outstanding Paper Award from the Soil and Crop Science Society of Florida, served as President of the organization in 1980-81, and was recognized as an Honorary Lifetime Member of that society in 1997. She won the Ciba-Geigy Award from the Society of Nematologists in 1982. She also won awards from grower and commodity groups on several occasions, including the Council Memorial Tomato Research Award (twice), National Agricultural Plastic Association Best Paper Award, Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association

Research Award, and Florida Ornamental Growers Association Award. Amegda was recognized as one of the Alumnae of Outstanding Achievement by the University of Florida in 1997.

Beyond the many achievements in her professional career, Amegda was very active in her local community. She served as a member of the Planning Commission for the City of Bradenton, as Representative to Senator of the Florida Silver Haired Legislature, as member of the Board of Directors for the Area Agency on Aging (Dept. of Elder Affairs), and in the Manatee County Master Gardeners' program.

Amegda is survived by her sister-in-law, Rosemary Jack, and was preceded in death by her husband Douglas and her brother, George N. Jack.

This eulogy was prepared using information from the Proceedings of the Florida State Horticultural Society (Vol. 101, 1988), the Soil and Crop Science Society of Florida Proceedings (Vol. 57, 1998), The Bradenton Herald, and the ONTA archives. The comments and suggestions of Drs. Julia Meredith, Renato Inserra, and Don Dickson are gratefully acknowledged.

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