Glenn W. Burton (1910 – 2005)

Glenn W. Burton image source: http://www.tifton.uga.edu/fat/tifton85.htm

Glenn W. Burton is one of the most highly decorated scientists in USDA history. Among the numerous awards bestowed on him during his career are his election into the National Academy of Sciences in 1975 and induction into the ARS Science Hall of Fame in 1987. He also received the President's Award for Distinguished Federal Civilian Service in 1980 and the prestigious National Medal of Science from President Ronald Reagan in 1983.

After graduating from Rutgers University in 1936 with a Ph.D. in agronomy, Burton began his USDA career as Principal Geneticist with the Agricultural Research Service's Division of Forage Crops and Diseases at the University of Georgia's Coastal Plain Experiment Station in Tifton, Georgia. At that time, few nutritious grasses for cattle were available in the South. Burton worked on improving bermudagrass for forage production and, in 1943, released 'Coastal' bermudagrass.[1] 'Coastal' is among the most successful forage grass varieties grown for hay and forage production in the southeast U.S.[2]

Burton also worked on bermudagrass for golf courses. In the 40s, many southern golf courses used sand-surfaced putting greens and centipedegrass and/or poor quality bermudagrass on fairways.[3] In 1946, Dr. Fred Grau, USDA scientist and director of the USGA Green Section, visited Burton to discuss the possibility of creating improved bermudagrasses for lawns and golf courses. As a result, Burton developed and released 'Tiflawn' bermudagrass in 1952 for use on lawns, playgrounds and golf course roughs.[4] 'Tifgreen' was the next significant release, with the fineness and quality necessary for golf course putting greens.[5] The next improvement in quality for putting greens was 'Tifdwarf', released in 1965.[6] The crown jewel of Burton's turfgrass development career, however, was the development and release of 'Tifway (419)' bermudagrass.[7] 'Tifway' is arguably the most widely used turfgrass cultivar for fairways and athletic fields worldwide.[8] 'Tifway' was a featured grass for use in the 2014 World Cup in Brazil.

In addition to his work on turfgrasses, Burton made significant advances in the improvement of pearl millet—an important grain crop in many developing countries—that were important contributions to the Green Revolution.[9]

Burton lived to age 95 and died in 2005.

For more information on Glenn W. Burton:

Hallauer, Arnel, "Glenn Willard Burton," *Biographical Memoires*. Washington, DC: National Academy of Sciences, 2008. http://www.nasonline.org/publications/biographical-memoirs/memoir-pdfs/burton-glenn-w.pdf

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[1]Wayne Hanna et al, "The History of the Development of Forage Bermudagrass: III A Focus on Digestibility and Yield," September 2011, Georgia Cattleman, 4 November 2014, http://www.caes.uga.edu/commodities/fieldcrops/forages/Ga_Cat_Arc/2011/GC1110.pdf

[2] Dennis Hancock et al, "Selecting a Forage Bermudagrass Variety," 31 December 2013, UGA Extension, 4 November 2014, http://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.cfm?number=C919

[3] Walter Reeves, "The Story of Bermudagrass—Dr. Glenn Burton," Walter Reeves Lawn Care, 4 November 2014, http://www.walterreeves.com/lawn-care/the-story-of-bermudagrass-dr-glenn-burton/

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Kevin Morris, President, National Turfgrass Federation, "Re: Glenn Burton," E-mail message. 30 October 2014.

[9] Agricultural Research Service, "Fueling the Green Revolution," 6 June 2008, United States Department of Agriculture Agricultural Research Service, 30 October 2014, http://www.ars.usda.gov/is/timeline/green.htm