

# Mario Charles Therrien

(1953 – 2011)



**Mario Charles Therrien was happiest when in the field. Born:** Tuesday, November 17, 1953 **Died:** Tuesday, September 20, 2011

The barley community has lost one of its most personable figures. Dr. Mario Charles Joseph Therrien died unexpectedly on September 20, 2011 at the age of fifty seven. Mario had experienced a heart attack on September 9<sup>th</sup>, and had been recovering at home following surgery at the time of death.

Mario was born in Quebec City but spent his early years on a dairy farm in Armagh, Quebec. At age 12, he moved with his family to Springfield, Massachusetts. Mario graduated with co-degrees in Biological Science and Education from the Springfield Technical College and University of Massachusetts. Mario obtained his Ph.D. in 1981 with a specialization in Plant Genetics from McGill University, after conducting research on induced mutagenesis in Birdsfoot Trefoil. An NSERC post doctoral fellowship brought

Mario to Manitoba where he worked on oat genetics at the Cereal Research Centre in Winnipeg. In 1982, Mario accepted a position as a Research Scientist at the Brandon Research Centre, where he spent the rest of his professional career breeding barley varieties.

Mario had released a dozen varieties throughout his 29-year career as a barley breeder. Beyond the main focus of barley breeding, Mario conducted research in Genetics to investigate means of accelerating variety development and Agronomy to help producers grow barley varieties more efficiently. Within his research program, he was challenged by a multiplicity of end-use goals and designed barleys for a number of classes including: six-row malting barley, hulless and hulled feed barleys, forage and silage barleys and more recently milling, food barleys for use in blends with wheat flour. Mario's successes included the registration of dominant varieties such as Virden, AC Rosser and AC Ranger, which have contributed to the prosperity and livelihood of Canadian livestock producers.

One of Mario's strongest attributes was his dynamic personality and ability to provide leadership and collaborate well with others within the barley community. He was motivated by interactions with other grain industry workers and participated on many committees and forums of technology transfer. He conducted numerous field tours at the research centre and assisted on expert panels in local agricultural fairs and agriculture extension. He was a member of the Canadian Society of Agronomy and Crop Science Society of America, served as an executive member of the Barley Development Council, was a member of the Eastern Prairie Barley Group, was a representative of the Parkland Diversification Foundation of MB, received an honorary lifetime membership from the Canadian Seed Grower's Association, and was elected as a member of the International Barley Genetics Council and was appointed curator of the world collection of male-sterile barley germplasm. He held Adjunct and Faculty Advisor status at Brandon University where he had also taught courses in Genetics, and was a thesis advisor for the University of Manitoba. While carrying out the duties associated with running a research program, he maintained a balance with home-life and took part in such activities as coaching his children's soccer teams, leading Cub Scout troops and was an avid fisherman.

Mario had a long-term association with the registration recommending committees in western Canada, serving in various capacities with unquestionable devotion since he joined in 1983. He served two terms as the Breeding and Agronomy Evaluation Team Chair for the Barley and Oats Subcommittee between 1992-1998. Mario held the office of the Chair on the executive council of the PRRCG (now PGDC/ PRCOB) between 2001-2004. Mario coordinated the western cooperative six-row barley registration test for 28 consecutive years. He co-founded the western cooperative forage barley registration test which he also coordinated for 12 years. Mario's dedicated contribution to the registration process through both administrative and scientific roles is acknowledged.

Those of us, who were fortunate to know Mario, will miss his unique presence and perspective. He always chose an optimistic outlook on life and possessed a fantastic sense of humour. He loved to tell grandiose stories and interactions with others were always coloured by his keen wit. Mario is survived by his wife Heather, and three children (Marc, Rachel and Sarah).

2011 Roseland two-row hulless food

2008 Desperado six-row forage or feed

2006 Binscarth six-row forage

2006 Millhouse two-row hulless milling

2001 AC Ranger six-row forage or feed

1999 Black Bart six-row black-hooded sheep fodder (in New Zealand)

1998 AC Bacon six-row hulless feed

1996 AC Rosser six-row feed

1996 AC Hawkeye six-row hulless feed

1994 AC Buffalo six-row white-aleurone malting

1986 Virden six-row forage

1984 Heartland six-row feed