

Pike honored with Lifetime Achievement Award from Texas vegetable industry

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SAN ANTONIO – The Texas International Produce Association recently honored Dr. Leonard Pike with the Lifetime Achievement Award at the Viva Fresh Show in San Antonio.

Pike, pioneer of the 1015 onion as well as other vegetables that contributed to the Texas economy, died Jan. 12. He was 78.

Dr. Bhimu Patil, who was appointed director of the Vegetable Improvement Center at Texas A&M University following Pike's retirement, accepted the award on behalf of the Pike family, colleagues and friends.

"Dr. Pike was my mentor and his passion for developing healthy veggies helped producers and has had a long-lasting impact on human health, reducing health care costs," Patil told attendees. "My job as the director of the Vegetable and Fruit Improvement Center, is to continue his legacy.

"We will expand his work by providing scientific proof of concept of health benefits of fruits and vegetables through the help of transdisciplinary scientists using systems-wide approach. This way consumers will eat more healthy produce while producers will make a reasonable profit. Dr. Pike's kindness, encouragement and nobility have positively influenced many of his colleagues, students and staff."

Pike retired from Texas A&M AgriLife Research in 2006 as a horticulture professor and vegetable breeder.

The Arkansas native said at the time of his retirement that vegetable production was not at the top of his list of interests once he got to college. Onion growers in the Rio Grande Valley who were wanting to solve problems with inconsistency and disease came to Pike for his expertise. Pike, who had already bred successful cucumber varieties, developed the 1015 onion,



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which he named after the planting month and date, Oct. 15. It was originally dubbed Texas 1015, but became known simply as the 1015 in producer circles.

The name stuck, and an onion study from 1983-98 showed a \$1.2 billion value to the state's economy from the 1015, with \$360 million going to farmers during that period.

Pike received many awards throughout his career, including the highest research awards given by Texas A&M, the Texas produce industry and also a Fellow in the American Society for Horticultural Science. In 2003, he received Texas A&M's Spirit of Innovation Award, recognizing his developments had the greatest economic impact of the first 2,000 inventions recorded within the Texas A&M University System.

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Dr. Bhimu Patil, director of the Vegetable Improvement Center at Texas A&M University in College Station, and Dante Galeazzi, CEO and president of the Texas International Produce Association. (Texas A&M AgriLife Research photo by Blair Fannin)