

# Robert Carl Baker

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A man unequaled in generosity of spirit and nature, Bob Baker was known as the “Edison of the poultry industry” for his work in the development of new food products. Just as he “added value” to chicken and turkey meat and eggs and to underutilized fish for Sea Grant in his work, he added value to and greatly valued all those around him. A caring man of great honesty and integrity, he helped his family, students, employees, colleagues, and friends to achieve their greatest potential. In addition to food product development work, he contributed much to the body of applied research on the microbiological and chemical properties of poultry meat and eggs, as well as the quality and safety of these foods. And what New York summer would be complete without chicken barbecues cooked with his famous Cornell Chicken Barbecue Sauce that he invented?

Dr. Robert Carl Baker was born in Newark, New York and moved to a fruit farm (where they also had chickens) in Sodus, New York when he was twelve years old. Thus began a lifelong interest in apples and poultry. Bob Baker received a B.S. degree in Pomology from Cornell in 1943, and then served in the U.S. Army. After his honorable discharge from the Army, he became an Assistant County agent in Orange County, New York. From 1946-49, he was an Assistant Professor of Poultry Husbandry at Pennsylvania State University, where he also received his M.S. degree in Agricultural Economics in 1949. Bob began his distinguished career at Cornell in 1949 as Assistant Professor of Poultry Extension in the Department of Poultry Science in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. He received a Ph.D. degree in Food Science from Purdue University in 1956 and upon returning to Cornell in 1957, he initiated the Poultry Food Science program. This program became an active and integral part of the department as well as the Institute of Food Science, where Bob was fully engaged in extension, research and teaching activities. This is where he and his staff developed over 58 new poultry, egg and seafood products, many of which are still marketed today.

Dr. Baker advised, mentored and befriended many domestic and international graduate students and influenced the lives of many young food scientists during his tenure at Cornell. Over 75 graduate students have studied and conducted research under his tutelage. These students are now prominent food scientists who are employed in the food industry, academic institutions and government agencies throughout the world. Bob was the first graduate field representative (now called the Director of Graduate studies) for the Graduate Field of Food Science and Technology at Cornell and served in this position for 12 years. He personally met and counseled all incoming graduate students, thus enabling them to smoothly embark on their graduate careers. During his tenure as field

representative, the number of graduate students in Food Science increased from 10 to nearly 100. In addition to helping them academically, he regularly invited students to stay at his home when they needed help with housing. Students and his staff took part in many Baker family get-togethers, dinners and outings at his Cayuga Lake beach in Lansing, New York. Bob had a keen sense of family and together with his wife Jacoba (Jackie) and children Dale, Myron, Kermit, Regina, Maureen, Johanna, and Karen they hosted many sporting activities at their home including ice hockey, basketball, and softball with Bob encouraging everyone to get involved in whatever game was being played. He was certainly unselfish with his time and talents and made everyone feel welcome in his home.

Dr. Baker gave lectures, taught workshops and consulted on the development of new food products and the start-up of poultry operations in more than 20 countries. He was the Director of the Cornell Institute of Food Science (1970-75) and the Chairman of the Poultry and Avian Sciences Department (1980-87) prior to his retirement in 1989, and was inducted into the Poultry Hall of Fame in 2004. He developed and for many years taught a popular course entitled "Food Science for Industry"; one week he and staff presented a lecture and a laboratory on the scientific basis for preparation of a food product and the following week students toured a commercial food processing plant where the food product was manufactured on a large scale.

Dr. Baker was a Fellow of the Institute of Food Technologists, a member of the Poultry Science Association, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the New York State Agricultural Society and many other professional societies. He also served on the American Egg Board Scientific Advisory Committee and on the American Poultry Historical Society. Bob was also a dedicated member and supporter of the Cornell chapter of Alpha Zeta fraternity (an agricultural honorary fraternity). In addition to his full and successful academic career and his many contributions to Cornell University, Dr. Baker started a food service business, Bakers' Chicken Coop, in 1949 at the New York State Fair, featuring chicken barbecued with the Cornell Sauce, which thrives to this day. In retirement, with his wife and daughter, he ran Bakers' Acres, a Lansing, New York nursery and apple orchard. A lifelong community leader, he was involved with many activities in Ithaca and Lansing, New York. He was a founding member of the Lansing Lions Club and the Lansing Housing Authority, which planned and built the Woodsedge retirement apartments in South Lansing, New York. He helped initiate the Lansing Community Council and was very active in the Lansing Methodist Church. Dr. Baker was also a member of the Ithaca Rotary Club, was a member of the Lansing School Board and the North Lansing Fireman's Auxiliary.

Bob Baker's enduring work ethic in academics and science was great and far-reaching, but it was matched equally, if not surpassed by, his deep love for his wife and family and friends. He possessed many outstanding qualities

and will be remembered for his trust, integrity, honesty, and generosity with loved ones, as well as with colleagues, friends, and even strangers and his great sense of humor.

He certainly made a difference in the lives of many people who he touched and will be fondly remembered by all of them.

*Charlotte Bruce, Donna Scott, Robert Gravani*