

2017

## JIM KUHN LEADERSHIP AWARD

*California Alfalfa & Forage Association,  
Representing the Alfalfa and Forage Growers of California*

**Dan Putnam**

*Alfalfa Specialist, Plant Sciences Department,  
University of California, Davis, CA*

The Board of Directors of the California Alfalfa & Forage Association (CAFA) is very pleased to select Dan Putnam as the 2017 recipient of the Jim Kuhn Leadership Award.

The Jim Kuhn Leadership Award is presented annually to a person or organization for their lasting contributions to the California alfalfa industry. The award was established in 2005 in honor of Kuhn, an industry icon, forage innovator, and farmer who died in a vehicle accident near his ranch in El Centro, California. Nominees are judged on their knowledge of alfalfa, record of leadership and the extent and depth of their contributions to the California alfalfa industry.



There isn't a more deserving individual for this prestigious award than Dan. He is a world-renowned expert in alfalfa forage quality and alfalfa management. He is a frequent invited speaker at scientific conferences, a sought-after collaborator in alfalfa-related research projects, and an influential scientist in forage crop production. One of the things that sets him apart is his keen eye on the evolving needs and challenges of California producers, and his ongoing commitment to providing science-based solutions. It is rare to find top level plant scientists with such a firm connection to local and regional growers.

Some of Dan's significant contributions to the alfalfa and forage industry include mentoring students and new farm advisors, co-authoring and producing the *Irrigated Alfalfa Management* book, and improving subsurface drip irrigation opportunities. He was also a major contributor to *Alfalfa, Wildlife, and the Environment*, a publication which is still a valuable educational tool about the importance and benefits of alfalfa in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He is also a major contributor to the *UC Alfalfa and Forage News Blog*, which is followed by many to keep up to date on production issues.

Dan was also one of the founders of the California Alfalfa & Forage Association, and still serves on its board. He participated (along with Jim Kuhn, Philip Bowles, Tom Ellis, Joe Rominger, Norm Yenni, and Mel Coelho) in a meeting with Marc Reisner in 1997 in Sausalito, CA, which prompted the development of CAFA. Mr. Reisner (now deceased) authored the 1993 book 'Cadillac Desert' – a fascinating review of western water development and woes – which was nevertheless quite critical of alfalfa as a 'water waster'. Reisner named alfalfa one of the 'CRAP Crops' (cotton, rice, alfalfa, pasture) which he wrote has had a tremendous impact on western water, at the expense of the environment. The counter argument was that alfalfa not only contributes a tremendous amount to

food production, but also to environmental and soil health. Reisner eventually came to agree with this perspective, but his question during this encounter was ‘where has the alfalfa industry been all these years?’. This led to a decision by the founders of CAFA to form an association to articulate a farmer’s perspective: “In order to be heard, one must have a voice” – as Jim Kuhn said in a 1997 Symposium presentation.

Dan was born in southern Ohio and raised in a small town there, surrounded by corn, soybean and hay fields. He worked summers at a relative’s Ohio dairy farm, where he learned to appreciate the process of food production, from crop management to the harvest of fresh milk. In his early teens, his family moved to New Hampshire where he continued to work on neighboring dairy farms before moving to the Boston area during high school where his father took a position as an administrator at Harvard University.

Dan went back to the Midwest to attend Wilmington College (Ohio) where he studied agriculture in the 1970s, and after graduation, he and his wife Panna moved back to New England to take a teaching job at a small private school. Due to his interest in agriculture and science, after a few years, he decided to obtain his advanced degree. He lived on a small New England dairy farm in Deerfield, Massachusetts, milking cows in the morning, and going to grad school in the afternoon. In 1986, he received his PhD in Plant & Soil Science from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. During this time, he spent one year in India on a Fulbright Scholarship studying sorghum, peanuts and sunflower and working on corn and soybean research in his graduate work at Amherst. His first position was at the University of Minnesota, St. Paul, researching new, little-researched crops such as canola, dry beans, lupin, quinoa, amaranth, alternative forages, camelina, flax, and sunflower, before taking the position at the University of California Davis. Since 1993 he has been the Alfalfa/Forage Specialist in Cooperative Extension at UC Davis, conducting research and extension activities on this important crop.

“Having lived in different parts of the country, I’ve come to deeply appreciate and respect the different types of agriculture in our country. From small New England dairy farms, to the Midwestern grain farms, to California’s diversity, the process of agriculture fascinates me. The innovative nature of California farmers in particular has always impressed me – here people are quite willing to try new things and take risks,” says Putnam.

He is chair of the California Alfalfa Workgroup, the California and Western Alfalfa Symposia, is a founding member of the California Alfalfa & Forage Association, and has many publications on alfalfa and forage crops. His research work on alfalfa includes work on irrigation management, varieties, genetics, and forage quality.

He lives with his wife of 41 years, Panna, in Woodland, CA, has two married children - Satch and Anjali, who are settled in Southern California, and 4 granddaughters.

*--Jane Townsend, CAFA; Mark McCaslin, Forage Genetics; Rachael Long, UCCE*