

**MEMORIAL RESOLUTION OF THE FACULTY  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON**

**ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR EMERITUS E. MICHAEL FOSTER**

Dr. Edwin Michael “Mike” Foster, professor emeritus at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, passed away in Madison on February 11, 2013. Born on January 1, 1917 in rural Alba, Texas, Mike leaves behind a legacy as an internationally respected food microbiologist and as an academic administrator who greatly enhanced the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s prominence in the world of food safety research. Mike spent his childhood on a small cotton farm where he learned the value of honesty, sincere communication, fairness, trustworthiness and leadership. From an early age, he displayed academic promise and a drive to succeed. Encouraged by his mother and other family members, he rode a horse several miles each way, in all weather, to attend school. His down-to-earth character followed him through his illustrious career, and he gained the highest respect from the food industry, regulatory agencies, and academic colleagues.

He was the first in his family to attend college, earning BS and MS degrees from North Texas State Teachers College. With encouragement from his MS mentor, he applied to a number of graduate programs in microbiology. He received one admittance, from the UW-Madison Department of Bacteriology. That, together with a \$400 annual scholarship from the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation, led him to take a long, dusty bus ride in the heat of summer to begin his graduate studies in Madison. Mike earned his PhD in 1941 under the direction of Dr. William Frazier. He then went to the University of Texas where he taught bacteriology and married his life-long companion, Winona Lively, with whom he shared 65 years of marriage.

During World War II, Mike was commissioned as an officer in the U.S. Army Sanitary Corps, and served at Fort Dix, New Jersey and at the Chemical Warfare Service in Fort Detrick, Maryland. His activities at the latter are recounted in the 2007 PBS American Experience documentary, “The Living Weapon.” In 1945, he was discharged as a captain and returned to UW-Madison, where he served with distinction for the next 42 years. Mike established a national reputation in the public health aspects of food microbiology and rose through the professorial ranks. He received numerous honors and awards from many governmental and private organizations throughout his distinguished career. Mike also was an active leader in his discipline: he served as secretary and president of the American Society for Microbiology; he was named a charter fellow and served as president of the American Academy of Microbiology; he was a charter fellow of the Institute of Food Technologists; and he served on food safety advisory committees for the National Academy of Sciences/National Research Council, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the World Health Organization.

Although the above alone would constitute an admirable career, Mike established his greatest impact in 1966 when he coordinated the transfer of the Food Research Institute (FRI) from the University of Chicago to UW-Madison. Under his guidance, FRI became the source for food safety expertise and established a tradition of excellence that continues to this day. Mike served as director of FRI in its new home and oversaw its growth from a small research group into a world leader in food safety and foodborne disease research. Under Mike’s leadership, FRI was recognized as an effective and impartial group that encouraged academic, regulatory and food industry personnel to come together to discuss openly and address important food safety and public health issues. In 1975, Mike established the Department of Food Microbiology and Toxicology to complement FRI and became its first chair. He insisted on a multi-disciplinary approach to problem-solving, enlisting expert help from faculty in other UW-Madison departments to address pressing and emerging food safety challenges.

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Mike was well known for his research in food microbiology. His studies on vacuum-packaging and plastic films allowed meat processors to extend from two to eight weeks the shelf life of refrigerated, ready-to-eat meat products. He was an international authority on the use of sodium nitrite to prevent botulism and spoilage. He recruited scientists to FRI whose expertise included the microbiology of food pathogens, the relationship of food with cancer prevention, harnessing botulinum toxin for medical use, food allergies, and the toxicology of food additives and preservatives. He nurtured the development of many faculty and was proud to see many become leaders in food safety in industry, government and academics.

As a faculty member, Mike directed the graduate programs of 18 PhD students, many of whom went on to achieve prominence in the food industry and academia. Mike was an exceptional role model, teaching and demanding rigorous scientific inquiry and effective communication of the results. The impact he had on his students and other food microbiologists who came under his influence cannot be overstated. After retirement, Dr. Foster made generous contributions to establish three awards: the E. Michael and Winona Foster Wisconsin Distinguished Graduate Fellowship in Food Microbiology at FRI; the E. Michael and Winona Foster-WARF Wisconsin Idea Graduate Fellow in Microbiology in the Department of Bacteriology; and the E. Michael and Winona Foster Antibiotic Research Fund in Bacteriology. Grateful that his original WARF scholarship opened the world to him, he wanted to do the same for other deserving young people.

Dr. Mike Foster's extraordinary accomplishments benefitted the university, the State of Wisconsin, and the nation. He is profoundly missed.

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