

Here is the published obituary for Dr. Stefansson (Winnipeg Free Press).

Baldur Stefansson
January 07, 2002

Dr. BALDUR R. STEFANSSON

Dr. Baldur Stefansson died on January 3, 2002 at the age of 84. Baldur is survived by his wife Sigga, children, Bjorgvin, Helga and Paul; their respective spouses, Miriam, Michalis, and Louise ;grandchildren, Stefan, Jennifer, Aris and Matthew; sisters, Fjola and Lilja; and many nieces and nephews. Baldur was born April 26, 1917, at Vestfold, MB, son of Gudmundur and Jonina (nee Halldorsdottir) Stefansson. In addition, to his parents, he was predeceased by a brother Halldor, and sisters, Lauga, Gudny, and Gudrun. Three siblings died in childhood. Baldur was raised on the family farm where hard times forced him to interrupt his studies in Grade 9. However, upon leaving the army after the Second World War, at the age of 28, he was able to satisfy his thirst for knowledge by finishing high school and then by completing his BSc, MSc, and later his PHD in the Department of Plant Science, University of Manitoba. He began working at the university in 1952 and remained a member of the university faculty for his entire working life until he retired at the age of 68. He was an internationally recognized plant breeder who dedicated his life to successfully transforming the lowly rape seed plant into a high quality edible oil plant, and thus became known as the "Father of Canola". Among the numerous awards he received for his achievements are, Order of Canada, Royal Bank Award, GCIRC International Award of Research, Wolf Prize (Israel), Order of Manitoba, Order of the Falcon and honorary doctorates from the Universities of Manitoba and Iceland.

Obituary **Baldur Stefansson**

The man who started a multimillion dollar farm industry with his genius has died.

Baldur Stefansson, dubbed the Father of Canola, died at age 84 on Jan. 3.

In 1974, plant breeder Stefansson turned a minor crop called rapeseed, used as an industrial oil, into canola, one of the world's most popular food oils.

He never profited from his discovery. Rapeseed was grown on just a few hundred thousand acres in Western Canada before Stefansson's work. Today, from 10 million to 12 million acres are grown every year in Western Canada. The development of canola also ensured the survival of the Winnipeg Commodity Exchange. Canola is the dominant crop on the exchange, making up about 85 per cent of trade.

Stefansson's canola also spawned canola oil processing plants in every Prairie province, creating hundreds of jobs. But Stefansson never profited from his discovery, said Bernie Dronzek, a former colleague and the current associate dean of food and sciences at the University of Manitoba.

"He never made a cent," said Dronzek. "It was in the public domain. He got a few awards that had cash attached to them, but he donated those, too."

Max Polon, former president of the Manitoba Canola Growers Association, said farmers always appreciated what Stefansson had done for them.

"He was a friend of the farmer who could relate to farmer problems. He enjoyed coming out to meetings and talking with producers," Polon said. He said Stefansson started out trying to develop a soybean for Western Canada, but soon realized its limited potential. So Stefansson began to cross-breed rapeseed with a forage variety of rapeseed, a member of the brassica crop family that includes turnips, broccoli, Brussels sprouts and radishes. By repeated cross-breeding, Stefansson was able to eliminate rapeseed's undesirable erucic acid content. At the same time, fatty acid that is beneficial, like oleic acid found in olive oil, increased.

"He was very innovative. He thought of new ways of doing things," said plant breeder Rachel Scarth, who worked with Stefansson at the University of Manitoba Plant Science faculty. Scarth called Stefansson's story "a classic example in plant breeding to show the benefits of investing in research."

"This is what plant breeding can do. It can revolutionize a crop," said Scarth, who is also the agriculture faculty's associate dean of research. The canola industry is worth over \$2 billion annually to Western Canada in terms of export sales of canola seed, oil and meal (animal feed). By being first to develop canola, Stefansson gave Prairie farmers a five-to-seven year head start over competition in other countries, she said.

Stefansson's canola was also developed to suit Canadian climate conditions. The biggest example of that is Stefansson developed canola as a spring crop, whereas most of the world grows fall-seeded crops.

Stefansson received numerous awards during his lifetime including: the Order of Canada, Order of Manitoba, Order of the Falcon, and honorary doctorates from the Universities of Manitoba and Iceland.

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