

Pioneer in International Plant Quarantine Work

A personality symbolic of 40 years' progress in international plant quarantine activities was lost to the official Washington scene with the passing on 7 July of Ernest Ralph Sasscer at the age of 71.

His half-century career in the U.S. Department of Agriculture is epitomized in the citation accompanying the distinguished service award he received from the department in 1953: "For inspirational leadership in planning, organizing, and directing the Department's activities against the entry and spread of plant pests, thereby adding to the Department's prestige at home and abroad." This highest attainable departmental award was probably his most cherished recognition.

Born in Waldorf, Maryland, 23 October 1883, Sasscer received his secondary-school education at McDonough Institute, LaPlata, Maryland. He obtained his B.S. degree at the Maryland Agricultural College (now the University of Maryland) in 1904 and his M.S. degree there in 1913. He was employed during the summer of 1904 as a nursery inspector by the Maryland Experiment Station. On 21 October 1904 he was appointed a scientific aide in the old U.S. Bureau of Entomology, where he specialized in the taxonomy of the scale insects. Thereafter his entire professional career was spent in the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

There were three fields in which

Sasscer made his major contributions. First, was his recognition of the danger to American agriculture of foreign plant pests arriving in imported plant materials, and his pioneer work in developing the department's foreign plant quarantine program. As a result of this recognition he led in developing an international consciousness of the need for world-wide plant quarantine protection. He succeeded in stimulating uniformity and high standards in international plant protection safeguards. Much of his success in this field was due to his integrity and the respect in which he was held by plant quarantine officials in other countries. This international service was recognized by Queen Juliana of the Netherlands on 9 November 1953, when she conferred on him the Officer's Cross of the Order of the House of Orange-Nassau. In 1954, King Baudouin of Belgium named him an officer of the Order of the Crown.

Another major field was his development of vacuum fumigation as a means of destroying insects on plants and plant products. This pioneer work expanded into modern plant quarantine fumigation procedures.

Also, under his direction, the function of the plant quarantine inspector was transformed from something of a police-like role to that of a highly trained professional specialist. This Sasscer accomplished by emphasizing in-service

training, so that many of his men became specialists in entomology, plant pathology, and botany, with special emphasis on the plant quarantine aspects of these sciences. He was a great morale builder and greatly increased the effectiveness of the plant quarantine program through the weight of his own personality and sincere interest in his men.

A congenial companion, he had a keen sense of humor and was skilled at repartee. He enlivened his talks with apt anecdotes. He was impatient with the red tape in which the promulgation of plant quarantines became enmeshed in the past decade.

Following his original appointment in 1904, Sasscer quickly advanced to positions of increasing responsibility. He became a scientific assistant in 1906, chief inspector of the Federal Horticultural Board in 1912, and entomologist and executive officer of the board in 1924. During these years he was the author of many publications on scale insects and vacuum fumigation. In 1928 he was appointed head entomologist in charge of the Division of Foreign Plant Quarantines, Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine, in which office he continued until his retirement in October 1953.

In 1951, Sasscer was a member of the United States delegation to the conference called by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations at The Hague. The conference worked out the final draft of the International Plant Protection Convention, a treaty now in effect.

Sasscer was a past president of the American Association of Economic Entomologists (1939) and the Entomological Society of Washington (1918, 1919) a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and a member of several other scientific and professional organizations.

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Our present era is characterized by something new in the life of man, and that is the impact of science and applied science or technology on our lives. However, our ultimate goal is not science, just for science's sake; our goal is a higher degree of culture and civilization. We should realize that science is not the measure of civilization—science and technology are merely tools, not ends in themselves.—GASTON F. DU BOIS.