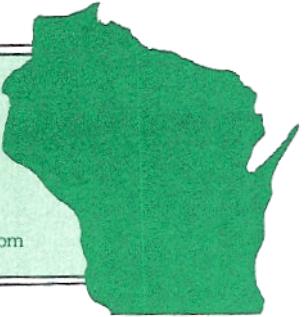


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## Okray Receives World Potato Congress Industry Award

The World Potato Congress Industry Awards were presented during the 11<sup>th</sup> World Potato Congress in Dublin, Ireland on May 31, 2022. Awards were presented to Dr. John J. Burke, Richard W. "Dick" Okray, Paul C. Struik and Antoon Wallays for their long and distinctive work in the international potato industry.



### Dick Okray

Richard W. "Dick" Okray was born in Stevens Point, Wisconsin. The son of Joseph and Patricia Okray, he attended school in Stevens Point and graduated in 1977 from Pacelli High School. In 1981, he taught English in Cali, Colombia and in 1982 he graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point with B.A. degrees in Economics and Spanish.

He was employed from 1982-2020 at Okray Family Farms in Plover, growing 7,750 acres of quality row crops in Central Wisconsin, specializing in fresh channel potatoes. The farm was started by his family over 110 years ago. His most recent position title was President and Sales. Following his retirement in 2020 he remains a co-owner of the family farm, which won a national environmental stewardship award for its outstanding achievement in the area of pesticide risk reduction.

The international potato industry has benefited greatly from the leadership of Dick Okray. He served on the Executive Committee of the US Potato Board (now known as Potatoes USA) and has served as a potato industry ambassador from the United States, attending multiple World Potato Congress events in China, Scotland, New Zealand and Peru.

He and his wife, Carol, were instrumental in helping raise funds to build multiple wells in impoverished villages near Cameroon, Africa. They established a WellersWalk event in Stevens Point, Wisconsin with participants filling and carrying large water jugs to a central location, raising awareness of the trek many villagers in Africa make daily just to gather enough water for their family's needs. Funds raised from the annual event were used to construct wells in areas around rural Cameroon, greatly improving the lives of thousands of villagers.

Active in his community and his industry, Dick has served on numerous organizations and boards including: Wisconsin Migrant Labor Council; Central Wisconsin Economic Development Corp.; United Potato Growers of Wisconsin and the United Potato Growers of America. Dick is also widely respected and admired for his philanthropic efforts, serving on the Board of Directors of the St. Michael's Hospital Foundation, the Edward J. Okray charitable Foundation and recently the Farming for the Future Foundation.

Dick served two terms, including one as Chairman of the International Committee, for the U.S. Potato Board. He also served on the Wisconsin Potato Industry Board from 2015-2020, and held the position of Vice President.

He received the WPVGA Agri-Communicator Award; the Portage County Business Council's Outstanding Contribution to Agriculture Award; and the prestigious University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point Distinguished Alumni Award. In 2019, he was inducted into the Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association Hall of Fame.

Dick has been married to Carol, for 38 years. They have three adult children: Xerxes, Hannah, and Max. A marvelous entertainer, Dick enjoys performing music and magic. In addition to golf and travel, he lists his hobbies as reading, learning and growing.

### **John Burke**

Dr. John J. Burke is one of Ireland's foremost experts in the area of potato agronomy. In the 1990s John returned to study to undertake a Ph.D. entitled "The effect of seed source, physiological age and desiccation date on yield and chip color in a range of potato cultivars."

John retired from Teagasc (Ireland's Agriculture and Food Development Authority), in 2007 having worked also on cereal disease control. In retirement he returned to his favorite crop to volunteer with Vita an Irish NGO working primarily in Ethiopia and Eritrea on potato development projects. He worked tirelessly to maximize the impact of potato, always with a focus on developing farmers' capabilities and knowledge. He spearheaded local seed production on virgin community land in Chencha, Ethiopia to prevent the spread of bacterial wilt, and pioneered the production of seed potatoes in mountainous regions in Eritrea to prevent viral degeneration.

### **Paul C. Struik**

Paul C. Struik has been a Professor of Crop Physiology at Wageningen University since 1986. He was the youngest ever appointed Professor in Wageningen at that time and potato has been the main focus crop over his career. He has conducted research on physiology, seed production, QTL-based modelling of crop growth and quality, seed system and chain management of agricultural produce in Africa, and sustainable intensification.

Many of his research projects are interdisciplinary in nature and in close collaboration with social scientists, bridging the gap between potato agronomy and development outcomes. Paul has been editor in chief of Potato Research, the journal of the European Association for Potato Research, since 1990 and a member of the EAPR board in various roles over the same period. He is co-author of more than 500 scientific papers in international journals, including the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences and a NATURE PLANTS paper, and 6 papers in Trends in Plant Science.

### **Antoon Wallays**

After his studies as a civil engineer, Antoon Wallays, together with his business companion and agronomist Luc Raes, created the Belgian potato processing factory Agristo in Hulste/Harelbeke. Both Antoon and Luc were sons of farmers and their spouses were active in the administration department of the company making it a real family business.

Since the beginning of his career he has been active in the Belgian potato trade & processing association Belgapom. As chairman of the environment group his role in the development of the Belgian potato industry was one of the most progressive regarding new water purification and re-use technology. He was responsible for the creation of the Flemish guideline for best available technologies, which became a reference document for the EU potato & vegetable processing industry.

As president of Belgapom (2006-2012) he played a crucial role in the development of the Belgian industry federation and the professionalisation of the European Potato Processors Association, of which he was for a long time an active board member.