

ROBERT L. MERCER (1994)



Transformation of the potato's public image from "just a starch" to "America's favorite vegetable" took place under the leadership of Bob Mercer, first Chief Executive Officer of the Potato Board. From the early 1970s Bob led the team that developed the first nutrition label for a produce item and went on to educate consumers about the outstanding nutritional values of potatoes. Today it's hard to find a person who doesn't know "it's not the potato, it's what you put on it." Bob grew up on a farm in Alberta, Canada, and later earned a bachelor's degree in physics from Brigham Young University and a master's degree in agronomy from the University of Maine. His first job after graduation was in agricultural research at U.S. Steel. He managed R.T. French's raw products division for over 15 years, serving with distinction on numerous commissions and boards. The Governor of Idaho gave him the award of highest merit for his work on the State Potato Advisory Committee.

For 22 years he headed the National Potato Promotion Board, representing America's potato growers. Under his leadership the Board became an example of outstanding commodity promotion, studied in business schools and emulated throughout the industry. In addition to turning around the image of potatoes in the U.S., another of his major accomplishments at the Potato Board was initiating the export program which has significantly increased demand for U.S. potatoes overseas. On his many trips in the U.S. and overseas, his personal charm (and his wife Bev's) won numerous friends for the U.S. potato industry. After retirement from the Board, Bob and Bev spent two years heading an LDS mission on the West Coast of Africa, where they no doubt created many more potato lovers along with their other good works.

A past president of The Potato Association of America, Bob is most respected for his leadership style which combines commitment to the industry with caring for the individual.