



National Association for Plant Breeding LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD 2026

**BRIAN SCHEFFLER
USDA-ARS
Stoneville MS**

The National Association for Plant Breeding (NAPB) Lifetime Achievement Award recognizes an individual who has given distinguished long-term service to the plant breeding discipline in areas such as breeding/genetics research and publication, education (graduate or undergraduate training), extension outreach, and regional, national, and/or international leadership.

The 2026 recipient of the NAPB Lifetime Achievement Award is Dr. Brian Scheffler, Center Director, USDA-Agricultural Research Service (ARS) Stoneville MS. Unfortunately, only a week before accepting the award at the NAPB annual meeting in June at Texas A&M University, College Station TX, Dr. Scheffler passed away. He will be missed by the entire NAPB community.

After joining the USDA-ARS in 1998, Scheffler moved through a range of positions, from Research Scientist to Research Leader to Center Director in Stoneville, MS, where he led the development of the Genomics and Bioinformatics Research Unit. Scheffler was instrumental in several ARS national initiatives benefiting plant breeding efforts across numerous species, target traits, and institutions. He led the establishment of multiple state-of-the-art sequencing facilities, providing essential infrastructure and new knowledge to develop the first high-quality reference sequences for an array of species, among them complex plants and animals, including cotton, peanut, cacao, catfish, insect pests and more.

As one colleague commented in a nomination letter: *“His group has had national and global impact on crop improvement, yet his leadership at the upstream side of generating high quality genome and transcriptome sequences often is obscured by the time a product of plant breeding is developed. His initiatives have resulted in the translation of transformative ideas with broad benefit to agriculture, and specifically plant breeding, but even beyond crop plants to associated organisms such as pollinators, fungal and viral pathogens, and insect pests.”*

While serving as ARS Chief Scientific Information Officer and holding a leadership position in the ARS’ Big Data Initiative, Scheffler contributed directly to the development and validation of the high-speed infrastructure and high-performance computing (known as SCINet), which is now helping to enable the application of a pangenomics approach to plant breeding.

Another colleague noted: *“Brian was always a natural at bringing the right people in the room and helping them succeed in solving complex programs—asking the tough questions. He led by example and by doing the heavy lifting, applying his decades of experience...always with a smile. Brian was one of the first people I would think of calling to tackle complex genomics/breeding projects. I cannot think of a*



more deserving person than Brian Scheffler for the NAPB Lifetime Achievement award for his contributions and impact to our field in US and internationally.”

Scheffler authored and co-authored over 250 journal articles and served as a mentor to numerous students, post-doctoral scientists and staff. Within the scientific community, he was Chair and Co-Chair of the Bioinformatics working group for the International Cotton Genome Initiative and member of the executive committee for the Peanut Genome Consortium. Scheffler’s research program included several international collaborations, including his role as Principal Investigator for the USDA-ARS Cotton Productivity Enhancement Program (2010 – 2017), bringing together U.S. and Pakistani scientists to mitigate the effects of the devastating Cotton Leaf Curl Virus.

Scheffler earned his B.S. (1982) in Agronomy from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and his MS (1986) and PhD (1989) in Plant Breeding and Cytogenetics from Iowa State University. He continued his research in positions at the John Innes Centre and University of Hamburg before joining USDA-ARS in 1998.



Dr. Brian Scheffler, Center Director, USDA-ARS Stoneville MS, the 2026 recipient of the National Association for Plant Breeding Lifetime Achievement Award.



Dr. Brian Scheffler, USDA-ARS Stoneville MS, the 2026 recipient of the National Association for Plant Breeding Lifetime Achievement Award with his research team at the USDA-ARS Genomics and Bioinformatics Research Unit in 2024. Left to Right: Dr. Keo Corak, Dr. Justin Vaughn, Dr. Adam Rivers, Dr. Brian Scheffler, Dr. Amanda Hulse-Kemp, Dr. Cal Youngblood, Sheron Simpson, Lolita Gladney



Dr. Brian Scheffler (right) Center Director, USDA-ARS Stoneville MS, the 2026 recipient of the National Association for Plant Breeding Lifetime Achievement Award, leading a tour of young students at the USDA-ARS Genomics and Bioinformatics Research Unit.



Dr. Brian Scheffler, Center Director, USDA-ARS Stoneville MS, the 2026 recipient of the National Association for Plant Breeding Lifetime Achievement Award at the International Cotton Genome Initiative meeting in 2016 (left to right - Dr. Brian Scheffler, Dr. Jodi Scheffler, Dr. Amanda Hulse-Kemp).