



FRED R. ROBERTSON
Alabama Agricultural Hall of Honor
1996

Fred R. Robertson was born in Oboin County, Tennessee, and grew up in the rough and tumble Reel Lake area of northwest Tennessee and Kentucky. He often worked three jobs at a time to pay his way to the University of Tennessee, where he earned bachelor's and master's degrees in agricultural economics.

Following his master's degree, Fred worked for the Tennessee Valley Authority from 1948 until 1953. In 1951, he applied for and won a prestigious Ford Foundation Scholarship to study public policy at Harvard College. His major professor at Harvard was John Kenneth Galbraith, one of the world's foremost economists.

In 1953, Fred joined the faculty at Pennsylvania State University, as a professor of agricultural economics. In 1959, he met E.T. York, then director of the Alabama Cooperative Extension Service, who brought Fred to Auburn as assistant to the director. A year later, he became assistant director and in 1962, he was named director of the Alabama Cooperative Extension Service. In 1966, he was named vice president for Extension, and retired in 1978 as vice president emeritus.

During his tenure as head of Extension in Alabama, Fred built a strong state staff and shifted control from individual county offices to a centralized state office. He made it possible for state specialists to return to school for advanced degrees, and when these leaders returned to Auburn, they brought with them new ideas and methods of extension education. In the process of these changes, the Alabama Cooperative Extension System became a national model in the 1960s and 1970s.

Fred and his wife, Martha Blount Robertson, still live in Auburn. They have one son, Fred R. Robertson III, who is an Auburn veterinary graduate and owns and operates Greenwood Veterinary Hospital in Greenwood, South Carolina.