

Obituary

**John A. Milner: In Memoriam
(1947–2013)**

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On December 31, 2013, the scientific community lost Dr. John A. Milner, an internationally respected scientist known for his work in human nutrition and cancer prevention. John served as Chief of National Cancer Institute's (NCI) Nutritional Science Research Group in the Division of Cancer Prevention from 2000 to 2012 and recently, as Director of the Beltsville Human Nutrition Research Center (Beltsville, MD) at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)/Agricultural Research Service (ARS) in Beltsville, MD. He enjoyed a fulfilling 35-year marriage to Mary Frances Picciano, a Senior Nutrition Research Scientist at the NIH Office of Dietary Supplements, who passed away in 2010. He is survived by their two children, Kristina Milner of Annapolis, MD, and Matthew Milner of State College, PA, along with a legion of loyal friends.

Born on June 11, 1947 in Pine Bluff, AR, John received his bachelor's degree (1969) in Animal Sciences, with a minor in Chemistry, from Oklahoma State University (Stillwater, OK) and his doctorate (1974) in Nutrition, with minors in Biochemistry and Physiology, from Cornell University (Ithaca, NY). He began his career as a faculty member in the Food Science Department and the Division of Nutritional Sciences at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (Champaign, IL). While there, he served as the Director of the Division of Nutritional Sciences and an Assistant Director of the Agricultural Experiment Station. From 1989 to 2001, he served as head of the Department of Nutrition at Pennsylvania State University (Penn State;

University Park, PA), where he also served as Director of the Graduate Program in Nutrition.

With colleagues in his research group at NCI and acting as an advocate for the extramural research community, John built up nutritional science through the use of NCI and NIH (Bethesda, MD) funding mechanisms—this possible through his energetic leadership and participation at NIH with other Federal, professional, and private organizations. He made his research group an important unit of the NCI and NIH and directed them to develop and coordinate external research programs in diet and cancer, from the role of diet and physical activity to the importance of micronutrients as modifiers of cancer risk and tumor behavior. John pushed for a more comprehensive understanding of the precise role of bioactive food components, encouraging research grant applications on how specific genes and/or molecular targets are influenced by either essential or nonessential nutrients. His long-term aim was always to identify people who would benefit or might be placed at risk from dietary interventions. John and his staff proposed numerous requests for applications, program announcements, and notices covering a wide range of nutrition-related research. They identified every funding opportunity coming from other sources at NIH and where appropriate, informed and exhorted scientists from many fields to apply with attention to the nutrition implications of these opportunities. John had a remarkable ability to identify important new areas of research activity in the fields of nutrition and cancer prevention that included the microbiome, metabolic research, nutrigenetics, and nutrigenomics, including epigenetic approaches, enhancing tumoricidal activity of natural killer cells by dietary components for cancer prevention, and many others. He disseminated this information at conferences throughout the world, informing scientists of new initiatives in nutrition and chemoprevention being developed within the NIH and NCI. John's presentations, interspersed with humor, were always well received,

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and he was frequently invited to speak at major forums on Molecular Targets for Cancer Prevention, where he was undaunted in engaging in the multidisciplinary dialog in the quest for knowledge and its translation to humans.

Training was another area where John's enthusiasm had a major impact. He and his staff alerted many individuals across the country of NCI programs for training, such as the Cancer Research Training Award, so that the prevention and nutrition communities could stimulate young investigators or their mentors to apply for training support—this also included training opportunities for underserved minorities. Moreover, John brought students to work in his research group and to take part in NCI's Summer Curriculum in Cancer Prevention. In various years, John invited professors from Purdue University (West Lafayette, IN) and the Universities of Arkansas (Fayetteville, AR), Illinois (Chicago, IL), and Florida (Gainesville, FL) to spend an academic year with his research group. Afterwards, many of them were encouraged to consider modifications in their own departments. Those trained by John oftentimes continued to contribute to the nutritional science community at large—examples include Terry Hartman (Penn State) and Young Kim (NCI).

John and several of his NCI colleagues collaborated with Nancy Colburn's laboratory and others at NCI Frederick studying biomarkers of response to bioactive food components as well as cancer stem cells as a potential target. With his expertise in designing diets to produce interpretable results, they also conducted nutritional intervention studies in prevention of colon cancer in mice and humans. This collaborative spirit resulted in major publications in *Cancer Prevention Research (CaPR)*, *Cancer Research*, and elsewhere on preventive nutritional interventions and predictive biomarker discovery. In 2012, he left the NCI to join the USDA as Director of the Beltsville Human Nutrition Research Center, where he continued championing the role of nutrition and diet from the molecular level to its use in nutrition policy development and implementation.

John was a major participant in several professional organizations, including the chair of the World Cancer Research Fund/AICR Working Group on Cancer Research Mechanisms, past president of the American Society for Nutrition [ASN; a constituent society of Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB)], and most recently, as incoming chair of the International Life Sciences Institute Global Board of Trustees. John was a member of the American Chemical Society's Chemistry Division, International Society of Nutrigenetics/Nutrigenomics, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, and the USDA's Human Nutrition Board of Scientific Counselors. He served on committees of the Institute of Medicine and the U.S. Olympic Committee Dietary Guidelines Task Force.

He was a fellow in both the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the Institute of Food Technologists, and an Honorary Member of the American Dietetic Association. In 2008, he received the David A. Kritchevsky Career Achievement Award in Nutrition from the ASN and was recently named the recipient of the Conrad Elvehjem Award for Public Service in Nutrition from ASN in 2013.

John was a productive and much-in-demand Senior Editor at *CaPR*. At the annual Editor Retreats, he was always energetic and convivial—ready to offer his constructive opinion in his distinctive baritone voice. John was on board with *CaPR* since its inception and contributed countless hours to help shape and strengthen our nutritional science expertise—for this, we are eternally grateful. Because of his efforts in nutrition and cancer prevention, his work will continue to have a major and lasting impact on the wider community of scientists studying nutritional interventions to prevent disease. John had an unusual ability to stimulate others to take on important questions never addressed, and he inspired all with his own relentless enthusiasm and energy. His optimism and passion about the utility of nutritional intervention as a means of cancer prevention has yet to be fully realized, but he helped "set the stage" for what we all hope to be a major approach to the prevention of human cancer.

His cooperative spirit, scientific integrity, guileless personality, and booming laugh has left an indelible mark and will be deeply missed by all of us. We are all the better having known him.

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