

Jerry Yang Graduate Research Excellence Award

Xiangzhong (Jerry) Yang was a professor in the department of Animal Science (1996-2009) and founding director of the Center for Regenerative Biology (2001-2009) at the University of Connecticut. Scotland was famous for Dolly the cloned sheep. The U.S. was equally well known for Amy, the first cloned bovine calf produced in North America; a feat achieved by Jerry Yang and his research team in 1999 at UConn. His pioneering work in nuclear reprogramming and stem cell research positioned UConn's agricultural research as a worldwide leader and brought considerable attention to the University of Connecticut.



As a visionary leader, Jerry's contributions to humanity extended beyond laboratory science to include exchanges for the benefit of improved communication and collaboration. As a PhD student at Cornell University, he established the society of Overseas Chinese Agricultural Students, organized its first conference and published its official journal. In 1994, he obtained funding from the Rockefeller Foundation and established "China Bridges International", a scholarship program to support overseas Chinese scientists to conduct short-term research in China. He led many U.S. delegations to China in an attempt to establish collaborative arrangements between the two countries. These included UConn faculty members and members of the administration including the President, the editorial board of the premier science journal *Nature*, and many colleagues from across the U.S.

Jerry Yang was revered as a scientist by his home country and this provided access to China's Premier for enhancing the lives of others. Jerry recommended three key advancements that were implemented and that have helped millions:

- Having been educated in a one-room school in rural China, Jerry never forgot the harsh life of local teachers who had to farm to support themselves. He contributed to the establishment of salaries for rural teachers nationwide.
- Seeing the lack of dairy products in the Chinese diet, Jerry worked with the Premier to gain approval for importation of American cattle genetics, subsidies to farmers to improve China's dairy industry, and for free "student milk" for all school children.
- Recognizing the underdevelopment of science and technology in China, Jerry recommended that the Premiere introduce a Chinese version of SBIR/STTR research grants which focus on public:private partnerships.

Jerry Yang passed away in 2009 after a long struggle with cancer. In his memory, his hometown of Hebei Province carved an image of him with his cloned calf on the stone wall in their provincial park, erected his statue in their best elementary school, and is renovating the home that Jerry grew up in as a museum. Jerry's commitment to research allowed him to make numerous important discoveries and also to use his research prowess to achieve humanitarian outcomes. His many colleagues from the U.S. and abroad contributed funds in his memory to establish this fund for recognizing research excellence in graduate students.