

The College of Agriculture recognizes Bikram Gill for 39 years of service as University Distinguished Professor.

Bikram S. Gill was born on 31 October 1943, in a small village called Dhudike, District Moga, Punjab, India. He was the fifth of 10 children. His parents were farmers; Bikram was always very interested in education and worked hard on his homework, graduating from high school in 1957 first in his class. He studied at DM College at Moga as a premedical student from 1959 to 1961. Bikram then went on to earn his B.S. degree at Khalsa College, Amritsar, in 1963, followed by B.S. Honors and M.S. Honors degrees in 1966 from Punjab University at Chandigarh where he became really interested in botany. Bikram lectured premedical students at GHG Khalsa College, Gurusar Sudhar, from 1966 to 1968.

In 1968, he was admitted to Brigham Young University. Working with Howard Stutz at Brigham Young, Bikram developed a chromosome staining technique for cereals. Bikram began his graduate work with Charlie Rick at the University of California, Davis in 1969. His Ph.D. thesis was on the cytogenetics of tertiary aneuploids with unusual transmission characteristics in tomato. When he came to Kansas State, he was frequently seen wearing a green fishing cap, Charlie's trademark.

After graduating from UC Davis, Bikram moved to the University of Missouri. As a graduate student, he had written a grant proposal for chromosome banding in wheat. Bikram had read about the work that was being done in human cytogenetics with chromosome banding and wanted to achieve the same in wheat. Following his heart, he was back into wheat research with Giles Waines at the University of California, Riverside. At Riverside, Bikram met Lennart Johnson, an avid collector and researcher of wild wheat species, who introduced him to the world of genetic resources.

On his birthday 31 October 1977, he was hired as an assistant professor to work on sugarcane genetics and breeding. Thinking he had found his niche with sugarcane, Bikram was surprised when one day he received a call from Gordon Kimber, who told him that Kansas State was looking for a wheat cytogeneticist and that he had already submitted his CV for the position. Barely a year and a half later he was on his way to Manhattan, Kansas. The world of wheat had called him back, and this time he would not leave.

Bikram's vision of a "one-stop shop" for wheat research became reality when he established the Wheat Genetics Resource Center (WGRC) at Kansas State University in 1984. The WGRC has been continuously supported by Kansas wheat growers through Kansas Wheat Commission grants since 1981 and USDA since 1989. Recognized as a center for excellence in wheat research by Kansas Board of Regents in 1984, the WGRC brought together plant pathologists, entomologists, breeders, and USDA personnel with a vision of germplasm conservation and utilization for crop improvement for sustainable production by broadening the crop genetic base; creating and promoting the free exchange of materials, technology, and new knowledge in genetics and biotechnology among the world's public and private organizations; and sponsoring graduate and postgraduate students and visiting scientists for academic training and advanced research in the WGRC laboratories. The WGRC gene bank maintains accessions of all the wild wheat species and, in addition, cytogenetic stocks, the genetic treasures produced by a lifetime of work by wheat scientists. The WGRC established a national and international network to conduct and coordinate genetic studies in wheat. Genes for host-plant resistance to viral, bacterial, fungal, and insect pests and abiotic stresses would be identified, transferred to agronomically useful breeding lines, and deployed. State-of-the-art laboratories, greenhouses, and field plot facilities for teaching and research helped establish the WGRC.