

**Remarks by  
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**National Historic Chemical Landmark Designation  
*Innovations in Dehydration Technology***

**Eastern Regional Research Center  
Wyndmoor, Pennsylvania  
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Thank you and Good Morning! I’d like to take this opportunity to extend a very warm welcome to

- ❖ The dignitaries from the Department of Agriculture,
- ❖ The representatives of the Eastern Regional Research Center,
- ❖ Local and federal legislators,
- ❖ My fellow members of the Philadelphia local ACS section, and
- ❖ All other honored guests

It is a real pleasure to join you today to recognize the seminal research in dehydration technology that was conducted right here at the Eastern Regional Research Center (ERRC) and to celebrate this recognition with the presentation of a National Historic Chemical Landmark --- the 57th National Historic Chemical Landmark.

Before we get started, I would also like to extend a heartfelt thanks to all of the hardworking people at the ERRC for their efforts in making this event “*happen.*”

I am here today as President of the American Chemical Society, the largest scientific society in the world with over 160,000 members and whose Spring National Meeting in Chicago focused on the Sustainability of Energy, Food and Water;

I also have other strong connections to ERRC:

As Leader, Technology Partnerships at the Rohm and Haas Company – an \$8B specialty materials company – which had been collaborating on “Adhesives from Biomass” with Dr. Tom Foglia here at the ERRC;

- ❖ As a neighbor – whose neighbors, like Winnie Yim, works here at ERRC
- ❖ As a mom, whose son, James, was judged at the recent Montgomery County Science Fair scientists – several from ERRC.
- ❖ And on a lighter note, as an adult, who has fond memories of growing up and eating instant mashed potatoes – with her six siblings!

As President of the American Chemical Society, I am proud to commemorate the advances in chemical engineering that made convenience foods such as mashed potatoes and crispy potato snacks, possible. These products are known to millions of people around the world.

But before I discuss this seminal achievement, let me talk briefly about the landmarks program, why did the ACS start the National Historic Chemical Landmarks program fifteen years ago? We did it for two reasons.

First, we wanted chemists to recognize and celebrate our profession’s rich history. The **more than fifty** landmarks that we have designated demonstrate how chemists have expanded the frontiers of knowledge, developed life-saving drugs, advanced industry, and delivered exciting, new products.

Second, we wanted Americans to understand and appreciate how chemists have improved the quality of our every day lives. Our first landmark, for example, honored Bakelite — the world’s first synthetic plastic. Along the way we have also recognized such notable accomplishments as the development of:

- ❖ Nylon — the world’s first, commercially successful, synthetic fabric;
- ❖ Penicillin — the antibiotic that helped win a war; and
- ❖ Tide — the first heavy-duty, synthetic detergent.

All landmarks must satisfy three criteria. They:

- ❖ Must represent seminal achievements,
- ❖ Must have occurred at least 25 years ago, .....and
- ❖ Must provide a significant impact and benefit to society.

The landmarks, cited above, meet all of these requirements, as does the exciting innovation we are celebrating here today. But I must place special emphasis on the third requirement, providing a significant benefit to society.

Work on the potato flake process began here at the ERRC in the early 1950s, an era that coincided with significant changes for women in our society.

The Donna Reed Show did not tell the whole story. Some women worked out of need; others worked to attain the “leisure” that increasing affluence provided. In either case, women wanted convenience foods – foods that simplified meal preparation and saved precious time.

Affluence also meant that Americans had more money to spend on food. In the 1950s, consumers could afford more expensive foods – meats and fresh vegetables, for example – while avoiding old staples, such as potatoes.

Potato production was already under attack due to economic pressures beginning in the Great Depression and even earlier. The plight of American agriculture is a long tale, but suffice it to say here that potato producers – *and the story is not unique to potatoes* – suffered from overproduction which led to lower prices for growers. The changes in eating habits meant that potato surpluses only got larger.

The attempt to solve this problem – that is, what to do about crop surpluses – is precisely why we are here today. This facility, like other regional centers around the country, came into existence to find new markets and new uses for regional farm products. For the ERRC, that meant R&D (research and development) to convert a perishable commodity – the potato – into a non-perishable commodity, that is, one with a stable shelf-life

So, in the 1950s, a multidisciplinary team of chemists, chemical engineers, and food technologists zeroed-in on the potato, studying how to reverse the decline in potato consumption. The result ...was the potato flake process, about which you will hear more about later in the program from John Sullivan, one of the key researchers.

But I want to make one final point: The research conducted here was and is instructive about science at its best; multidisciplinary and collaborative. Scientists and engineers from many fields ...collaborated at the ERRC to discover processes that had a significant societal benefit.

All of these reasons are why we at the American Chemical Society are proud to designate “the work on dehydration technologies that led to the potato flake process” as a National Historic Chemical Landmark.

Dr. Cherry, would you join me in unveiling the plaque and reading the inscription?

“Chemists, chemical engineers, and food technologists at the Eastern Regional Research Center developed innovative dehydration technologies, most notably the potato flake process and explosion puffing. These technologies created opportunities for the development of novel, high-quality convenience foods and food ingredients for domestic and global markets. Instant mashed potatoes and formulated potato crisps, both made from potato flakes, are among the most popular and recognizable food products ever created. These food dehydration technologies increased U.S. potato production and utilization, provided key products for food aid programs, and made a lasting and significant impact on the ways in which foods are processed worldwide.”