



George Louis Casler

September 17, 1929 – June 12, 2015

Professor Emeritus George Louis Casler was a New Yorker and a Cornellian. Born in Herkimer County New York, he graduated from West Winfield Central School as the valedictorian of his class. After earning a B.S. degree from Cornell in 1950, he owned and operated farms in Cortland and Seneca counties. While farming, George injured his back—a problem that plagued him for the rest of his life—and he returned to Cornell, earning a M.S. degree in 1959. He then served as a farm management extension specialist at Cornell from 1959 to 1962, before entering a Ph.D. program in agricultural economics at Purdue University. He joined the Cornell faculty in the Department of Agricultural Economics, now the Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management, as an assistant professor in September 1965 and became a full professor in 1975.

Professor Casler's teaching, research and extension efforts focused on topics in production economics and farm business management. His experience as a farmer helped him develop effective working relationships with extension educators and their farm clients. On campus he taught Production Economics for a few years in the late 1960s. Subsequently, he taught senior-level Advanced Farm Management, *inter alia* covering the principles in a textbook that he co-authored: *Capital Investment Analysis*. This book was used in teaching both college and extension audiences and was revised through three editions. He also collaborated on the development of a computer program to assist farmers and extension agents in evaluating major capital investments for farm businesses.

Professor Casler sometimes had strong opinions that were forcefully expressed but worked effectively in the team-oriented culture of the farm management faculty. He participated in the development of sequential schools as a method of teaching extension clients within and across county lines. He worked closely with department colleagues to develop teaching materials on farm finance, capital budgeting, and other management topics. He also often led efforts to experiment with new quantitative tools for the classroom and extension teaching.

George played a major role in research concerned with the current status and future development of agriculture in New York State (Project Toward the Year 1985); this was an important effort to

blueprint the “current status and future development in agriculture in New York State.” Along with coordinating inputs to the project, he authored three and coauthored one of the series of 14 publications. In the mid-1980s, Professor Casler returned to this theme with important contributions to a companion assessment entitled “Agriculture 2000,” this high profile project was undertaken by the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences in collaboration with the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets.

Professor Casler was actively involved in interdisciplinary research, working extensively with crops, soils, and engineering faculty. He took responsibility for evaluating the economic implications of the agronomic research on fertilization, and he was the departmental representative to the College task force on agricultural wastes. The early 1970s saw new efforts to uncover and understand the environmental consequences of farm and food production methods, and Professor Casler was a principal investigator for a Rockefeller grant for research in this area. This grant supported an interdisciplinary team focused on methods for predicting nutrient runoff and leaching from agricultural land, as influenced by climate, soil characteristics, and agricultural practices. Because of the significance of the New York State dairy sector, management of nutrients on dairy farms became one of the centerpieces of environmental concerns for the State, and Professor Casler was at the forefront of efforts to understand the consequences of policies designed to ameliorate environmental problems associated with livestock production. In particular, he conducted research on waste management and disposal, including cutting-edge work on the economics of on-farm generation of methane gas. George contributed a chapter to the book *Nitrogen and phosphorus: food production, waste and the environment: a report of an interdisciplinary research project* (Ann Arbor Science Publishers, 1975), an important output from this research.

Over his career, George made significant contributions to three long-standing extension programs. In 1977, he assumed leadership of the Cornell Farm Tax Program. This educational effort dates to the 1920s, and after World War II, emphasis was placed on program delivery through regional tax schools for farmers and their tax preparers. Professor Casler’s pivotal role in the quality and sustainability of this program was chronicled by his colleague, Stuart Smith, who reported that, in the 18 years Professor Casler led the program, they taught 170 tax schools to nearly 22,000 tax practitioners with over 1,000 hours of teaching. Professor Smith indicated that “George was willing to teach many of the most difficult tax topics like Alternative Minimum Tax, Limited Liability Companies, Passive Activity Losses and Tax-Deferred Retirement Plans. He had the interest and ability to dig into the tax code, figure out what it meant, and explain it to his audience so it made sense. George Casler made a major contribution to the success and longevity of the Cornell farm income tax school.”

Professor Casler was also a regular contributor to the department’s Economic Outlook Program. He co-authored a chapter in the department’s annual Economic Outlook report and made presentations at the December Economic Outlook Conference. These efforts capitalized on his interests and his ability to disentangle economic relationships for the New York State farm sector, analyze the prospects for viable farm businesses, and explain it all to a lay audience.

In addition, George was a member of the team of management and finance faculty who annually developed and taught extension training programs for Extension Agents and farmers. He made

contributions to programs in dairy systems, investment analysis, cost-price squeeze and the dairy buyout, among others. A part of this effort involved support and management of another legacy program, the Cornell Dairy Farm Business Summary (DFBS). George worked in concert with other farm management staff and faculty to assemble, analyze and disseminate this basic intelligence on dairy farm costs and returns in New York State. At the time of his retirement in 1995, Professor Casler was presented with an Excellence Award by the New York State Association of County Agricultural Agents for his work in Farm Management Extension.

Professor Casler was a life member of the Agricultural and Applied Economics Association (AAEA). In addition to service on several AAEA committees, he was a member of the Northeast and North Central farm management extension committees. He was a participant on the Cornell National Dairy Herd Buyout Program Team that developed educational materials for a major dairy policy initiative under the 1985 Federal Food Security Act. This team's work received the 1987 Distinguished Extension Program Award from the AAEA.

With an enthusiastic interest in wine-making, George was a lifetime member of the American Wine Society. He chaired the local chapter for many years. He was also a member of City Club of Ithaca and served on the Corporation Board of Alpha Zeta fraternity and was their long-time Treasurer. He also served two 3-year terms as treasurer of the Cornell College of Agriculture and Life Science Charitable Trust which provides financial assistance to students in the College.

George is survived by his wife, Patricia and sons, William, Donald, and Dale; by three grandsons, Donald Jr., Jack and Michael; and by three brothers.

Bill Tomek, chair; Nelson Bills, Ed LaDue