

Lawrence Bryce Darrah

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Lawrence B. Darrah was an important contributor to the teaching and research programs of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and the Department of Agricultural Economics during his 30 years of service on the faculty, 1944-74. A native of West Virginia, he received his Bachelor's degree at the University of West Virginia in 1939. He completed an M.S. degree at the Pennsylvania State University in 1941 and then entered the doctoral program in agricultural economics at Cornell, receiving his Ph.D. degree in 1944 under the direction of Professors F.F. Hill and E.G. Misner. The title of his thesis was "Commercial Poultry Farming in New York State." During much of his early career, his work was intimately connected to the poultry industry. He was appointed an Instructor in April 1943 and his substantial talent as a teacher was quickly recognized. He became an Assistant Professor of Marketing in 1944, was given tenure in 1946, and made a Professor of Marketing in 1951.

Professor Darrah initially taught a course in marketing eggs and poultry products. His success as a teacher and communicator led to his receiving responsibility for the introductory course in agricultural marketing, which began to attract students from throughout the college and other colleges of the University. In 1955, he was chosen by the senior class of the college to receive their Professor of Merit Award given annually to one professor for the outstanding quality of his teaching. In 1971, the American Agricultural Economics Association honored him for the excellence of his teaching, the 7th such award granted by AAEA nationally.

Darrah's performances in lectures are legendary. Nearly every lecture was an exciting demonstration to illustrate a concept. One of the favorites each year was to bring a large box of chocolate-covered cherries to class. He would then hold an auction to see how much a student was willing to pay for the first chocolate covered-cherry. He then kept that student in front of the class ascertaining his willingness-to-pay for more cherries until Darrah was paying the student to consume one more candied cherry. Finally the student refused more at any price. The concepts of demand, time and place utility, and diminishing returns were all illustrated. His final lecture each semester included a series of awards to students based on his keen observations of their behavior during lectures and discussion sections throughout the term.

Darrah and his colleague and friend, Dr. Max Brunk, collaborated in writing a basic text, *Food Marketing*, in 1967, which they revised in 1971. It was the standard text for the course for a number of years. A succession of able teachers followed in Darrah's tradition using his text and classroom illustrations successfully. Student demand

for the course led to it being offered each semester. Darrah was also a top-notch student advisor, often working with 40 to 50 students annually on their academic programs and later helping them find employment in the food industry and business. He was one of the builders of the agricultural business program that in the 21st century has become an accredited undergraduate business degree program, located within the Department of Applied Economics and Management at Cornell.

In the 1950s, Darrah was one of the leaders in the Department in carrying out studies of new methods of handling and merchandising perishable products. Most of this work was developed with colleagues in the Departments of Poultry Science and Food Science. This was the period in which the self-service, supermarket industry grew rapidly throughout the country. Darrah worked effectively with Professor Robert Baker (Food Science and Poultry) in developing and then studying new methods of packaging and merchandising eggs and poultry products. The acceptability of new products was tested with Latin Square designs in supermarkets at selected locations throughout the Northeastern States. A number of the products, now found in supermarkets, such as frozen French toast, chicken hotdogs and frozen egg whites, had their origin in these studies. Many ideas were tested, even taking cracked eggs, breaking them and putting them in plastic containers (“naked eggs”). Retailers and manufacturers, as well as consumers, benefited from this early merchandising research.

Larry and his wife, Wanda, were effective ambassadors for the College and University. They had three tours of service at the College of Agriculture, Los Baños, of the University of the Philippines. The Darrahs first took a two-year assignment in 1957 to help the Filipino staff design and then teach a basic course in agricultural marketing. He worked with a young staff member, P.R. Sandoval, in writing a new textbook, using examples from the Philippines. It was titled, *Marketing of Farm Products in the Philippines*. They returned in 1962 to assist the Philippines Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources with its research program in agricultural marketing. In 1970, when Cornell was working with the College at Los Baños to develop its graduate program in agricultural economics, Darrah returned to help establish courses and research programs in marketing in cooperation with the staff at the International Rice Research Institute, also located in Los Baños. He continued in this assignment for four years.

Retiring from Cornell as a Professor Emeritus in 1974, Darrah stayed on in the Philippines until 1980 working for their Department of Agriculture & Natural Resources in developing their research programs and statistical reporting system. He received honorary Master’s degrees from both the Philippine Special Studies Division, Agriculture and from the National Food and Agricultural Council. The Philippine Council for Agricultural

Research and the Alumni Association of the College of Agriculture, University of the Philippines, also presented special awards. He was much appreciated by his former students, the faculty of the College, and the DANR.

Wanda Darrah was an important contributor, along with her husband, to the Philippine community. She helped reorganize the library of the College at Los Baños in the 1950s and volunteered there on each of their subsequent assignments in the Philippines. They returned to Ithaca for health reasons and Mrs. Darrah died in 1984. Larry married Fern (Rusty) Rhoades in 1985 and moved to the Leisure World retirement community in Mesa, Arizona where they enjoyed the mountains of Arizona in the summers and the warmth of the Salt River Valley near Phoenix in the winter.

The Darrahs had three children: Dr. Larry L. Darrah, now retired as a research geneticist for USDA-ARS and Professor Emeritus, University of Missouri; Ms. Alice A. Darrah St. John, living in Florida, and Dr. Brenda B. Darrah, a physician in Illinois. There are seven grandchildren and three great grandchildren.

Larry Darrah was a loyal Cornellian, and throughout his life cared a great deal about his former students and the health of the University where he had worked and taught. He enjoyed good stories and playing practical jokes on his colleagues. There was a twinkle in his eye that stayed with him to his last years. His students, colleagues, and long time friends fondly remember him.

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