

# Robert Jeffrey Wagenet

*August 10, 1950 — July 31, 1997*

Robert Jeffrey “Jeff” Wagenet was born in Pittsburgh, California, on August 10, 1950. Following graduation from the University of California at Davis (1971) with a Bachelor of Science degree in Soil Science, he continued his education at the University of Oklahoma where he earned a Master of Science degree in Environmental Health in 1972. He returned to UC Davis for graduate studies and completed his Ph.D. degree in Soil Science in 1975. In 1976, he accepted a position at Utah State University, where he obtained the rank of professor within six years. Twice at Utah he was named Professor of the Year in the College of Agriculture. In 1982, Jeff and his family moved to Cornell University, where he began as Associate Professor and was soon promoted to full Professor in the Department of Agronomy.

Jeff Wagenet was recognized internationally for his work on the fate and transport of chemicals in soil, especially the transport and transformation of nitrogen fertilizers under irrigated conditions, the displacement and chemical reactions of inorganic salts in saline soils, and the movement of pesticides through soil. He cooperated in the development of analytical and numerical mathematical models describing these processes. He and his friend and collaborator, J.L. Hutson, developed a family of comprehensive numerical models with the acronym LEACHM that describe the fate and transfer of nitrogen fertilizers, inorganic salts, pesticides, and organic manure in soil. LEACHM has been used by numerous research and regulatory groups both within the U.S. and internationally. The models also have been extended for use with geographic information systems, soil survey databases and for climatological data to estimate pesticide leaching at a larger geographic scale. He published over 100 refereed papers and six book chapters. He was a member of the National Research Council’s Committee on Long-Range Soil and Water Conservation. During the course of his career, he was appointed visiting professor at Ecole Polytechnique Federale de Lausanne (Switzerland), Katholieke Universiteit (Leuven, Belgium), Department of Land, Air and Water Resources at University of California at Davis, Institute for Soil, Water and Climate (Pretoria, South Africa), and the Institute of Soil and Water of the Volcani Center (Bet Dagan, Israel).

Perhaps Jeff’s greatest contribution to Cornell was through his role as department chair from 1987 through 1995. Jeff was well respected by both his colleagues and CALS administrators for the open, organized and efficient manner in which he chaired the department. During his tenure as chair, Jeff oversaw a broadening of the scope of the department to include environmental concerns and modern information technology. As part of this change, the

Department of Agronomy was renamed the Department of Soil, Crop and Atmospheric Sciences. At the same time, Jeff will be remembered for his commitment to upgrading the department's agronomic research infrastructure, including major improvements to the Musgrave Farm at Aurora, New York. In addition, he successfully steered the department through a difficult financial period for the college.

Jeff was a great teacher and mentor. While at Cornell, he taught undergraduate and graduate courses on transfer processes in soils, as well as an interdisciplinary course of the fate of chemicals in soil. He was major professor to 17 M.S. and 10 Ph.D. students.

Jeff was a fellow of the American Society of Agronomy and the Soil Science Society of America. He received the Honor Award of the Soil and Water Conservation Society. He was Editor of the *Journal of Environmental Quality* (JEQ) from 1990-95. During this time, the journal was expanded from four to six issues per year and it became one of the premier environmental journals in the world. Jeff helped to broaden the journal's scope by implementing publication of papers under subject matter categories, which greatly increased the visibility of various environmentally related topics in the journal.

In addition to his professional work, Jeff was a merit badge counselor for Troop 4 Boy Scouts of America, served on the Science Center Board, and attended the First Congregational Church of Ithaca. He was a loving husband and father and good friend.

Jeff died peacefully at home on July 31, 1997 at the age of 46 after a seven-year struggle with brain cancer. He leaves behind his wife of 26 years, Linda; his son, T.R.; and his daughter, Kylie.

*Susan Ernst, Gary Fick, John Hutson, Harold VanEs, Linda Wagenet, Susan Riha*