

# Matthew Drosdoff

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Matthew Drosdoff culminated a distinguished career as Cornell's first professor of tropical soils following a long period of service as a scientist and administrator for the United States Department of Agriculture and the United States Agency for International Development.

In 1935, after receiving the B.S. degree from the University of Illinois, and M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in Soil Chemistry from the University of Wisconsin, Matt began his 31-year career in government as a research scientist and administrator. Much of his early efforts were devoted to tung oil research at the University of Florida, considered vital to the war effort. His international career began in 1950 when he first went to Central America as a member of a mission to identify soils and mineral nutrition problems of Manila hemp. In 1955, he joined the forerunner of USAID and spent five years in Peru as a soil science advisor to their Ministry of Agriculture. Matt then served four years in Vietnam and from 1961-64 was the chief of the U.S. agricultural mission in that country. He was then named Administrator of the International Agricultural Development Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, a position he held until he joined the faculty at Cornell in 1966.

Upon joining the Cornell faculty, Matt Drosdoff rapidly became one of its most active and distinguished members. Matt had a remarkable capacity to interact with people and involve them in the many activities that he undertook as a Cornell professor. Under his guidance, multi-disciplinary research programs on effective utilization of soil and water resources of the tropics were organized and carried out. Using discussion and persuasion, he was able to coordinate effective research among members of the faculty from Cornell and other universities and at in-country institutions. The result was a world-perspective of soil science. Even though he became emeritus in 1976, there still remains a core of soil professors in his former department active in research on soils of the tropics.

Matt's course in Properties and Management of Tropical Soils attracted many foreign students as well as students from the United States and remains a subject desired by many students interested in international development. He was heavily involved in the development and execution of an interdisciplinary course in Tropical Agriculture that included a field trip to tropical areas. This course likewise remains one that attracts many students annually. The graduate program developed by Professor Drosdoff and colleagues resulted in more than 20 M.S. and Ph.D. theses produced by students in the program. A feature of the program was the training of scientists in their own country at in-country research institutions. Building on this base, the subsequent graduate program in tropical

soils has remained very active. As a consequence, both U.S. and foreign students trained under these programs are in positions of leadership throughout the world.

At the same time, Matt interacted with faculty and students throughout the university and was highly influential in university affairs. He was a member of the Steering Committee of the Program for Science, Technology, and Society; the executive committee for Programs and Policies for Science and Technology in Developing Nations; and the executive committee for the Latin American Studies Program of the Center for International Studies. He served as a member of the Constituent Assembly and chaired the Faculty Committee on International Student Affairs. Matt was an inveterate tennis player and was a consistently formidable contender well into his eighties.

Professor Drosdoff chaired the Tropical Soils Committee of the National Academy of Sciences. He served as a consultant to the Ford Foundation and to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations among others. He was elected a Fellow by the American Society of Agronomy in 1969 and received its International Agronomy award in 1974. He also was a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Matt was born and raised in Chicago and died in Ithaca. He is survived by his widow, Mildred Binder Drosdoff, of Ithaca; a sister, Naomi Weinstein, of Chicago; a daughter, Ruth Tucker, of Cincinnati; a son, Daniel, of Fairfax, Virginia; a stepson, Jonathan Prigot, of Boston; a stepdaughter, Andrea Hovaness, of Westchester County; three grandchildren; and three step-grandchildren. His first wife, Sarah Max Drosdoff, died in 1978.

It is noteworthy that a life-long public servant, however distinguished his record, could become at the end of his career, a truly outstanding and energetic example of that unique species, the Cornell University professor. Matt Drosdoff, however, contributed a decade of extraordinary achievement to Cornell University and to soil science for which he will be long remembered.

*David R. Bouldin, Armand VanWambeke, Douglas Lathwell*