

Fred G. Lechner

September 23, 1915 — November 1, 1983

The retirement of Fred G. Lechner as professor emeritus, on September 1, 1982, concluded twenty-five years of teaching at Cornell and a total teaching career of forty-two years. Prior to his Cornell appointment Fred taught high school vocational agriculture at Holyoke and Brighton, Colorado. During the time he taught vocational agriculture he also served as a supervising teacher-trainer in agricultural education for the State of Colorado and was a member of the Future Farmers of America Advisers Committee.

Fred came to Cornell in September 1957, appointed as a staff member in charge of developing the new agricultural engineering mechanization teaching facilities. These facilities included hands-on laboratories for carpentry, plumbing, electricity, welding, and lathe work. The astute organization of each of these facilities attests to Fred's pedagogical expertise.

Fred was born in Hudson, Colorado. His college education included a B.S. degree in agriculture (1938) and an M.E. in agricultural education (1952) from Colorado A & M (now Colorado State University). His Ph.D. was attained in 1958 from Michigan State University, where he specialized in vocational agriculture. He met and married Frankie D. Hill while teaching vocational agriculture at Holyoke, Colorado.

Fred's educational background together with his teaching experience in vocational agriculture and agricultural engineering mechanization inspired him to develop a close working relationship with New York State vocational agriculture teachers. He provided special summer classes at Cornell so that they could work toward advanced degrees. He also developed pamphlets, study outlines, and visual aids that were used as resource material for high school vocational agriculture teachers.

Cornell students desiring hands-on experience in carpentry and metal work found that opportunity in Professor Lechner's classes. Basic instructions in woodworking, welding, sheet metal, and lathe were available. After becoming proficient in several of the crafts, a student was encouraged to combine them in a project. Many students designed and built various items such as picnic tables, feed carts, and sewing cabinets for their personal use.

Professor Lechner reached an audience much larger than those in the classroom. Active in cooperative extension, he co-authored bulletins and gave radio talks that made his expertise available to many. Examples of the subjects

covered included planning farm shops, tuning gasoline engines, and techniques of welding. Commercial welders and welding sales representatives stayed in touch with Fred to learn of new methods and techniques.

Fred was professionally active in promoting the teaching of high school vocational agriculture and was a member of the American Vocational Agricultural Teachers Association. He was a member of the American Society of Agricultural Engineers (ASAE) for twenty-five years. He used his influence to maintain agricultural engineering mechanization as a credible activity of the ASAE. As an ASAE member he was secretary of the Agricultural Teacher Education Committee for five years and held membership on the ASAE Instruction in Agricultural Mechanization Committee.

If any of Fred's activities could be called a hobby, it would be the development of mechanical devices. An ongoing project was his version of a lawn mower. Each summer, when his lawn was growing profusely, he would still be working on the latest modification of his mower. This tinkering would go on past the middle of July, which did not matter, as the mower could cut grass even though it was knee high. To save face in the neighborhood Frankie acquired her own mower and used it to keep a presentable front lawn. Fred also built his own orchard spray rig.

As part of his activities in the Department of Agricultural Engineering, Fred developed a cart to be used to distribute feed for livestock. Working together with other Cornell staff, he contributed his mechanical know-how toward the development of an automated plant grower. This device rotated shelves containing potted plants through a lighting and watering cycle. The schedule of the shelf movement could be adjusted to the day-length regimen of the plants. An internal watering mechanism provided water for the plants. Fred was awarded two blue ribbons by the American Society of Agricultural Engineers for these developments.

A large part of Fred's life was devoted to altruistic civic activities. One of these activities was the Lion's Club, which he initially joined during his first teaching assignment at Holyoke, Colorado. He continued his Lion's Club membership during his whole life, serving in various capacities as a local or district official. As a member of the Lansing Lion's Club he received a tribute from the Town of Lansing for his efforts in the renovation of the former Grange Hall into the Lansing Community Center. Fred also was secretary of the New York State Eye Bank, an activity supported by the Lion's Club. Other civic activities included being a Boy Scout leader, a member of the Lansing Central School's PTA, and a member of the Lansing Board of Education for one term.

Fred was an ardent supporter of the credit union movement. His credit union experience began in Adams County, Colorado, where he was a member of the board of directors. He served in various official positions of the Cornell

Professor Lechner received a number of awards. His most cherished recognition was the Distinguished Service Award for Civic Activities by the United States Chamber of Commerce. College scholastic honor societies included Alpha Zeta, Alpha Tau Alpha, and Phi Delta Kappa. As a high school teacher he was proud that the Brighton, Colorado, 1954 high school annual was dedicated to him. The Future Farmers of America awarded him the Honorary Colorado State Farmer Degree and the Honorary American Farmer Degree. He won four ASAE blue ribbon awards for excellence in developing plans and publications. The Agricultural Teachers Association of New York gave him a journalism award in 1972 and an honorary life membership in 1974. In addition to being Lansing Lion of the Year for 1969-70, Fred was awarded so many other Lion statuettes that there was no more room for them on the mantle.

Professor Lechner is survived by his wife, Frankie, of Ithaca; four sons and a daughter (all graduates of Cornell); and three grandchildren. John and Robert are involved as Ph.D.'s in cancer research and are located in Washington, D.C. Larry is a construction contractor, and Leland a professional surveyor (both located at Vail, Colorado). Linda is employed in food technology research at Hamlin, New York.

Wesley W. Gunkel, Norman R. Scott, Robert T. Lorenzen