



Kenneth L. Robinson

July 2, 1921 – December 8, 2010

Kenneth L. Robinson, Liberty Hyde Bailey Professor of Agricultural Economics Emeritus, left his own special mark on the students and faculty with whom he worked at Cornell University. He was a superb lecturer and teacher, and he inspired his undergraduate advisees to improve their innate skills and make a difference in their fields of endeavor. He set high standards for himself, his colleagues, and those who sought his advice. In his kindly way, he encouraged all of us to give our best in what we wrote, said, and did, and moreover he provided a fine example of commitment to the wider community.

Born in Olympia, Washington, July 2, 1921, Ken grew up on a fruit farm near Yakima, WA and earned his bachelor's degree in agriculture at Oregon State College in 1942. Enrolled in ROTC, he entered the army as a 2nd Lt. in the Field Artillery, serving in a variety of posts including some time in China at the close of the war. After the war, he worked briefly with his father on a fruit farm before entering the MS program in agricultural economics at Cornell University, where he wrote a thesis on the efficiency of alternative spraying systems for fruit. In 1948, Ken entered the Ph.D. program in economics at Harvard University, completing his degree in 1952. During this period, he also spent a year at Oxford University as an Elmhurst Fellow.

Professor F. F. Hill, then Head of the Department of Agricultural Economics, persuaded Ken to return to Cornell as a faculty member, and this proved to be an inspired decision, as Ken brought exceptional breadth to the Department's teaching, research, and extension programs. He was especially known for his expertise in farm and food policy and in agricultural prices. But, he also did the general economic outlook and taught a graduate-level course in production economics.

Ken became a widely heralded master teacher for undergraduate and graduate students, for extension educators, as well as for the general public. His lectures both on and off campus were enthusiastic, insightful, and full of information. His high standards were passed on to his graduate students, some of whom won national awards for their theses. They hold professorships and positions of leadership throughout the world.

Robinson was sometimes an outspoken critic of those journal articles that he judged to have little value. His reviews of manuscripts typically contained in-depth comments on substance as well as detailed editorial suggestions. He was a careful scholar and writer, and the quality of his professional work was recognized by his election as a Fellow of the American Agricultural Economics Association (AAEA) in 1979. The AAEA provided further national recognition in 1990 by its award for the quality of communication of his book, *Farm and Food Policies and Their Consequences* and in 1997 by its award for the enduring quality of the book, *Agricultural Product Prices*, co-authored with colleague Bill Tomek.

At Cornell, he was named a Liberty Hyde Bailey Professor, was elected a professor of merit by the senior class of CALS in 1959, and recognized with the College's Edgerton Career Teaching Award in 1987. His impact on undergraduate students and advisees is further evidenced by the endowment, in 1992, of the Kenneth L. Robinson Professorship of Agricultural Economics and Public Policy by John Dyson, one of Ken's undergraduate advisees. John has said "... he changed my life. ... His course awakened an interest in public policy that led me ... to a lifetime work in making such policy in New York State and City. He was unfailingly kind to me ... As an undergraduate, one spends a lot of time trying to figure out what to do with one's life and at every important juncture there was Ken Robinson with a helpful and supporting word."

Robinson took leaves to lecture in Japan, Portugal, and Australia. He spent a sabbatical leave at the Institute for Tropical Agriculture in Nigeria and another at the University of California, Berkeley. He retired from Cornell in 1987 after 36 years of distinguished service. Ken continued his active service to the Ithaca Community in retirement through tax counseling for senior citizens and low-income households, sorting books for the Friends of the Library, maintaining trails at the Nature Center, maintaining public gardens at Kendal at Ithaca, and serving on the Board and committees of United Way.

He is survived by his wife, Jean Anderson Robinson, a fellow Ph.D. student in economics at Harvard, and two sons: James, a lawyer in London, UK; and Alan, an engineer in San Francisco; and two grandsons. The Kenneth L. and Jean R. Robinson Scholarship Fund benefiting students in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences was established and funded by them in 1998.

B. F. Stanton, Chairperson; W. G. Tomek, and D. L. Call