

Robert Francis Lucey

March 13, 1926 — May 7, 2004

In appointing Bob Lucey to a new faculty position in Agronomy, one specifically authorized by the New York State Legislature at the urging of the Farm Bureau and Grange, the College of Agriculture renewed its efforts to raise farm productivity in the six northernmost counties of the state. Four decades later, Bob was recognized throughout that region as the principal architect of the sweeping changes that followed his appointment.

From the outset, he sought the counsel of leaders of the farm community, campus experts in many disciplines, educators, and local institutions as he formulated and later developed a series of diagnostic experiments. The centerpiece of his fieldwork was the “crop-climate” installation. Both farmers and advisers in the North Country had long attributed their difficulties in producing crops to adverse climate. By establishing weather instruments alongside and in the soil beneath plots where various crops were grown under several management systems, Bob demonstrated that there were actually two underlying problems. Slow drainage of water from the topsoil in spring delayed field operations and growth; few of the crop varieties available commercially were adapted to the region’s cool, though reasonably long, growing season.

By employing both traditional and novel practices to drain away water early in the season, he raised the soil temperature and effectively moved the plants south. By buying a four-row planter never before seen in the area, along with other equipment, he accelerated the establishment of large acreages on the newly warmed land. By thus creating a market for adapted seeds, he spurred the introduction of new quick-maturing high-yielding varieties. And by never forgetting that these improvements in crop production were significant only if integrated into dairy and other enterprises, he ensured the practical application of his findings.

The personal demands of the tasks he set for himself were extraordinary. The field work and organizations that dominated his schedule were as much as six nonstop driving hours from Ithaca, and his innumerable trips were rarely nonstop because it was his custom to visit, learn from, and advise a legion of contacts en route. He established agronomic research stations at Canton (SUNY College), Chazy (W.H. Miner institute), and Willsboro (E.V. Baker Farm), and oversaw a major soil management study on a farm near La Fargeville. He formed cordial and supportive relations with educational and advisory bodies throughout the region, becoming over the years the most widely sought counselor for a variety of problems. His continual liaison with state legislators ensured

sustained funding. The donation of the Baker Farm to the college, and the endowment of a Cornell faculty chair by Mr. Baker, testifies to Bob's presence as well as his influence.

On the Cornell campus, recognition of his talents led to a gradual shift in his duties. He had already been an adviser to undergraduates and taught the introductory crop production course, but increasingly became a leader in organizing coordinated research and extension programs across the state. With the Northern New York Agricultural Development Program as a prototype, he contributed greatly to the founding of the statewide PRODAIRY Program. He became chairman of his department, and served in that capacity for eleven years, meanwhile cultivating professional contacts and serving nationally and overseas. He was, for several years, Secretary of the University Faculty.

The Massachusetts family from which Bob came was a source of strength, but for them his venture into higher education was a trailbreaker. He pressed on through Master's and Doctorate degrees, encouraged and supported always by his beloved, Ernestine. The family of eight children they raised was notable for self-reliance, responsibility, and zest.

Bob's unassuming demeanor, friendliness and sincerity, curiosity, patience and optimism were tirelessly directed toward making his part of the world a place that its inhabitants understood more clearly, and used more rewardingly. For these qualities, he was honored during his career, and is remembered with respect and affection.

Robert A. Milligan, R. David Smith, Madison J. Wright