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Professor Emeritus Keith H. Steinkraus Remembered

By Elizabeth Keller

Geneva N.Y.: Cornell Professor Emeritus Keith H. Steinkraus, a specialist in indigenous fermented foods and food microbiology who joined the faculty of the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station in 1952, died on October 23 . He was 89.

"Dr. Steinkraus had a distinguished service of more than 36 years in this department," said Professor Cy Lee, chair of the Department of Food Science and Technology. "He will be missed greatly by many of us."

Steinkraus graduated cum laude from the University of Minnesota in 1939 and earned a Ph.D. in microbiology in 1951 from Iowa State University, where he remained for one year as an assistant professor before moving to Cornell. He was promoted to full professor in 1962 and retired as professor emeritus in 1988, although he remained active in his field and at Cornell for many years afterward.

Steinkraus began his studies of indigenous foods at General Mills, Inc., where he worked from 1943 to 1947. At Cornell, the experience of mentoring international students who had come from Asia, Central America and Africa to study the microbiology of their native foods prompted him to further this work with studies of fermented foods, including tempe, tape, trahanas, idli/dosa, and the fermented fish sauces and soy products of the Far East, including miso and tofu.

In 1959 Steinkraus was invited by the Interdepartmental Committee for Nutrition for National Defense to participate in surveys of the nutritional status of military personnel, their dependents and the general populations of South Vietnam, Ecuador and Burma. The project was later extended to include Indonesia, the Philippines, Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and Malaysia.

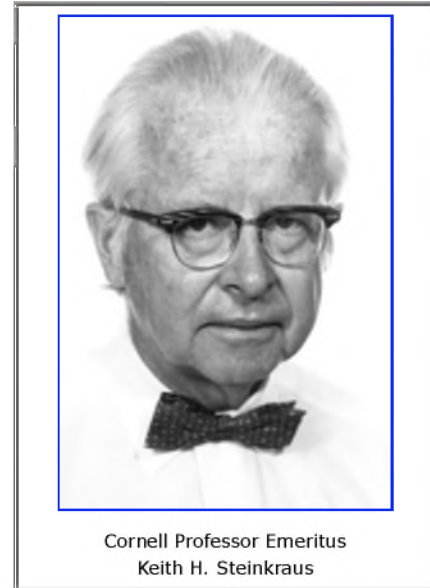
Over the course of his career, Steinkraus maintained and developed his connections with Asia as a consultant on food processing issues in Indonesia and as a teacher and researcher at the University of the Philippines College of Agriculture. In 1974, UNESCO/UNEP/ICRO invited him to lecture at the Institute of Technology in Bandung, Indonesia. He also lectured as a visiting professor in Thailand, Singapore, London, Germany and Switzerland. His Handbook of Indigenous Fermented Foods, published in 1983, was the first comprehensive and authoritative book on the subject.

Steinkraus's work has had significant impact internationally. He was the American delegate to the UNEP/UNESCO/ICRO panel on applied microbiology and biotechnology and worked as a consultant to the United Nations Industrial Development Organization to determine how genetic engineering and biotechnology could be used to help developing countries in Africa. He was honored in 1985 with the Institute of Food Technologists' International Award and was a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the American Academy of Microbiology.

A memorial service is is scheduled for Sunday, June 8, 2:00 pm at Sage Chapel on the Cornell Campus.

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