



IN MEMORIAM

William Fairbank
Professor of Environmental Sciences
UC Riverside
1926 – 2010

William C. Fairbank, a Cooperative Extension Specialist Emeritus in the Department of Environmental Sciences, died on September 12, 2010 from complications of surgery at the age of 83. He obtained his B.S. Degree in Agricultural Engineering from UC Davis in 1950. An agricultural engineer his entire career, he published papers on topics as widely ranging as sanitation in milking systems, night- time picking of produce and women in agriculture. His work earned several Blue Ribbon Awards from the American Society of Agricultural Engineers in the category of Educational Aids Competition. He was an author of 94 published papers. Although most of his publications were extension- type “how- to- do- it leaflets, circulars, bulletins, newsletters, he also authored technical papers published in professional journals and two book chapters.

Bill Fairbank has made many significant contributions to the field of agricultural engineering during his career. He was the first agricultural engineer in the United States to be assigned to a multi- disciplined research Extension team to investigate mechanical milking as a factor in bovine mastitis control. His research, which began in 1960, helped establish the University California as a leading institution in this area of research. The California program of research and extension in mechanical milking and mastitis control become the nationwide model for extension teaching. The American Society of Agricultural Engineers formed a Milking Equipment committee in 1962, on which Fairbank was a charter member and its first chairman. He was invited to give several talks and demonstrations, including one at the first International Symposium on Mechanical Milking in England in 1968. The Equipment Manufacturer’s Institute of America recognized the University and its mastitis research program as among the 100 most significant contributions to mechanization of agriculture.

In 1964 he shifted his extension focus to the nuisance fly problem in the state, especially in the San Joaquin Valley. The source of the problem was high- density livestock, poultry, feedlot, and horse operations. He was instrumental in the development of improved standards for manure management recognizing that better management of confined livestock operations needed to precede the use of chemical pesticides. He also wrote several publications that dealt with generation of fuel from manure and manure composting.

He made major contributions as program leader and innovator of practical illumination devices and support systems to facilitate night picking of perishable market fruits. Night picking when the fruit is cool and respiration rate is low extends shelf life, conserves refrigeration energy for precooling, and lessens thermal stress and fatigue on pickers. He designed many of the modern devices used in this operation. In response to a inquiry about adoption of night picking by the Memorial Committee, Bart Fisher, a vegetable farmer in the Pale Verde Valley, stated that Fisher Ranch does use night picking that starts at “about 3 am under lights, and ends sometime before noon to accommodate the worker comfort issue, and to maximize energy savings by bringing cooler fruit to the packing shed.” Bart Fisher concluded that he sees that “a few farmers are doing the same, but it is not a widely adopted strategy, because it remains somewhat out of the box thinking, in an industry with many hard and fast traditions.”

One of his final projects involved the development of a 22- ft diameter, overhead fan for cattle cooling with the objective to generate significant energy savings compared to conventional designs.

William C. Fairbank was born on December 17, 1926, in Woodland, California. He grew up in Davis and joined the Navy in 1944. He was preceded in death by his wife of 56 years, Patricia Holtz Fairbank. He is survived by two children, James Fairbank of Erie, Penn, and Mary Louise Mermilliod of Riverside, and by a sister, Betty, of British Columbia.

Acknowledgements:

The Committee thanks Dr. David Crohn and Mary Louise Mermilliod, daughter of Bill Fairbank, for their assistance in writing this Memoriam for Professor Emeritus William Fairbanks.

James Oster (Chair) Walter Farmer, John Letey and Albert Page