Memorial Resolution of the Faculty of the University of Wisconsin-Madison
On the Death of Professor Emeritus Truman F. Graf

Professor Emeritus Truman Frederick Graf died on Monday, August 7, 2017 at the age of 94. Truman was born and raised on a small, progressive dairy farm near New Holstein, Wisconsin. In the 1920s, long before the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) began to string power lines to Wisconsin farms, Truman’s father installed a gas-powered generator to produce electricity to operate milking machines.

With the financial help of merit-based scholarships earned while attending New Holstein High School, Truman enrolled in the University of Wisconsin-Madison after graduation. His undergraduate studies were interrupted when Truman enlisted in the Navy Air Corps shortly after the U.S entered World War II. He was commissioned as a Navy Ensign and trained to pilot a Helldiver Dive Bomber. He continued flying as a Navy Reserve pilot for a few years after the war ended before transferring into Naval Intelligence. He continued serving as a Navy Reserve officer throughout his professional career, retiring as a Full Commander after 30 years of service. After his discharge from active military service, Truman returned to UW-Madison to continue his studies, earning a BS degree in Agriculture (1947) and MS and Ph.D. degrees in Agricultural Economics (1949 and 1953). Upon receiving his doctorate, he was hired by the Department of Agricultural Economics as an assistant professor and subsequently promoted to associate professor (1956) professor (1961).

Professor Graf joined the faculty at a time when the Madison campus of the University of Wisconsin was growing rapidly in student and faculty numbers. It was also growing in its commitment to the Wisconsin Idea that the boundaries of the campus coincide with the boundaries of the state. In accord with that commitment, Truman’s appointment was largely funded by Cooperative Extension. His responsibilities were to assist farmers, dairy plant managers, cooperative and farm organization leaders, state and federal political leaders and others in promoting their understanding of issues related to milk pricing and marketing and to help them take actions beneficial to Wisconsin’s expanding dairy sector.

Truman’s dairy farm background, work ethic, engaging personality, and ability to quickly and accurately evaluate and explain complex dairy issues made him a perfect fit for the position. He spoke the language of his clientele. They understood him, trusted him, and benefitted from his well-grounded advice and counsel. He quickly became one of the most sought-after dairy spokesperson, analyst, and advisor in the United States, making countless presentations to constituent groups and frequently providing testimony at administrative and legislative hearings. He was an exemplary Extension specialist and his work enhanced the visibility and stature of the Department and the University.

Truman’s work covered the gamut of dairy pricing, marketing and policy issues. He placed particular emphasis on evaluating proposed changes in milk marketing orders and federal dairy policy, equitable pricing of milk, international dairy trade, and dairy promotion. He complemented his Extension program with solid supporting research, often in collaboration with graduate student advisees and colleagues in other states. In addition to his outreach and research, he taught dairy marketing to thousands of undergraduates and Farm and Industry Short Course students.

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Professor Graf’s immense contributions on behalf of dairy interests resulted in several prestigious awards. These included World Dairy Expo Man of the Year, Wisconsin Cooperative Leader Award, National Dairy Shrine Pioneer Award, University of Wisconsin-Extension Distinguished Service Award, and Wisconsin Federation of Cooperatives Cooperative Builder Award. Truman’s ability to effectively convey complex economic concepts to lay audiences was recognized by the American Agricultural Economics Association Quality of Communications Award in 1974.

The Department of Agricultural Economics benefitted from Truman’s benevolence as well as his academic and service accomplishments. Most notably, in the early 1980s Truman, among others, actively solicited funding to help convert a former dormitory into Taylor Hall, the department’s current home. He was personally responsible for generating donations exceeding $100,000, most of that amount coming from dairy cooperatives and state dairy leaders in gratitude for his many years of assistance. A few years later, he spearheaded a funding drive to convert a redundant Taylor Hall bathroom into a graduate student lounge, named in honor of John R. Commons. Donations from dairy cooperatives tallied more than $6,000. In 1989, Truman and his wife, Sylvia, endowed a scholarship to provide financial assistance to undergraduate students majoring in Agricultural Economics and Agricultural Business Management.

Upon his retirement in 1985, Professor Graf began a lengthy “second career” involving dairy development projects overseas. Funded by an array of granting agencies, he provided technical assistance to government authorities in Armenia, Bulgaria, Cuba, Czech Republic, Finland, Honduras, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Poland, Russia, Uganda, Ukraine and Zimbabwe.

Truman’s obituary contained his personal view of citizen responsibility, which seems appropriate to this memorial resolution: “My goal in life has been to make a contribution to society which will long outlast my stay on earth. I have attempted to do this through teaching, research, and public service work in my professional field, agricultural economics, and also as a “good citizen” in non-professional related volunteer work. My philosophy of life is that we all owe society far more than it owes us, and I hope to make at least a partial payment on my share of the debt.”

Truman is survived by Sylvia, his wife of 70 years; their children, Eric, Siri (Bill) and Peter (Barb); grandchildren, Sara and Christopher; and great-grandchildren, Maren and Viggo Masters.

Memorial Resolution Committee

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