

# Charles E. Palm

*June 24, 1911 — February 25, 1996*

Cornell University's first Liberty Hyde Bailey Professor of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Charles E. Palm, died at the Cayuga Medical Center at the age of 84. Under Palm's direction, the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences grew in strength and accomplishment to become a leader in research and teaching among land grant universities. Palm was Dean from 1959-72.

Three years after being granted the Ph.D. degree (Cornell, '35) in Entomology, Charley Palm became Chairman of his department, a position he held for 20 years. At 27, he was the youngest professor to serve as a Chair in Entomology. Under his direction, the Department became a leader in the innovation of pest management techniques. In 1957, he became Director of Research in the College of Agriculture, and two years later he was appointed Dean. He was able to convince the scientific community and the New York State legislature in particular that agriculture, the State's largest industry, deserved broad support. Palm's wisdom became most evident as agriculture moved into the era of integrated pest management (IPM). In recognition of the basic studies needed to support the college, Palm promoted a change in name to the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. The Department of Entomology was well positioned to take a significant role on the national level in the development of integrated pest management (IPM).

Palm was born in Austin, Texas and learned the essentials of farming as he grew up on a fruit and vegetable farm in Arkansas. In 1931, he earned the Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Arkansas and immediately entered graduate school at Cornell in Entomology and Plant Pathology. He was appointed Instructor in the department in 1934, a year before being granted his doctorate. He established programs in insecticide toxicology, insect physiology, and insect biochemistry. Again recognizing the growing importance of basic biological sciences, he was instrumental in the creation of the Division of Biological Sciences, an organization that spans the Colleges of Agriculture and Life Sciences and Arts and Sciences. With the strong commitment to research, the Division and the Department of Entomology developed a vigorous program in graduate training.

Charley was well known and respected among the farmers of the State as a practical entomologist. He earned the reputation with his development of control methods for various insects, especially for management of the alfalfa snout beetle. The temporary laboratory at which he conducted field studies was located on Myers Road

near Minetto, New York. He supervised a small group of graduate students at the location and thus the laboratory became an important resource for the local farmers in the solution of problems with pest insects.

Palm was Chairman of Entomology and then Dean of the College at a time of rapid change in environmental management and in agriculture. It was during this period that the scientific community recognized that no combination of chemicals would solve all agriculture's problems and indeed there were many hazards to be avoided. He exhibited great skill in transmitting the information to resolve these conflicts to those who supplied funding for the College. The agricultural industry needed support from the governor and members of the New York State Legislature. Palm served as the interpreter to gain that support. He was a member of the National Academy of Sciences and chaired that organization's National Research Council Committee on Plant and Animal Pests, producing a six-volume treatise establishing present-day pest management practices.

Not a colorful speaker, Palm had at his command, the reasoning and statistics to make strong arguments and he generally came away from formal presentations with the support of his listeners in hand. He moved the college from the old tradition of teaching farm practice to one of a more scientific approach to problems.

Palm was instrumental in bringing about the relocation of the Boyce Thompson Institute for Plant Research from an urban location in Westchester County to the Ithaca campus. This strong research organization was yet another boost to the international reputation of Cornell. Charlie retired officially in 1976 but he continued to serve as liaison between the Boyce Thompson Institute and the various cooperating scientists on the University Faculty.

Charles E. Palm is survived by his wife, Geraldine Gibson Palm; and a son, Alan, of Washington, D.C.

*W. Keith Kennedy, Arthur A. Muka, Edgar M. Raffensperger*