



Science
Societies

In memoriam: Donald Holt

March 2, 2026

In Memoriam

Donald A. Holt
1932–2025



Fellow (ASA and CSSA) and former President (ASA) Dr. Donald (Don) Alexander Holt passed away peacefully at home with his family present on Dec. 31, 2025, in Monticello,

IN. He was a renowned college administrator, mentor, teacher, scientist, farmer, father, and husband. He was born Jan. 29, 1932 Joliet, IL.

Holt obtained a B.S. degree from the University of Illinois in 1953, followed by an M.S. in 1954. He and his devoted wife of 72 years, Marilyn, were married in 1953. After a short time as Extension Specialist in Illinois, Holt and his wife operated the 500-acre family crop and livestock farm for seven years. He then entered graduate school in Agronomy at Purdue University, earning a Ph.D. in 1967. He joined the Agronomy Faculty that year and spent the first 15 years of his academic career at Purdue advising students and colleagues and conducting research on forage crops before moving on to an illustrious academic leadership career at the University of Illinois.

Holt advanced quickly through Purdue's academic ranks and established a reputation as someone whose advice and counsel—on a range of issues—was widely sought. Perhaps his greatest contribution was his commitment to helping students and colleagues succeed. He was always available to write award nominations for colleagues, lead in the writing of multi-investigator proposals, and go out of his way to generate resources and create environments where fellow scientists could succeed. This attribute of Dr. Holt's became acutely evident when he moved to the University of Illinois.

Holt returned to his alma mater in 1982 to become Head of Agronomy. The following year he was named Associate Dean for Research and Director of the Illinois Agricultural Experiment Station. In 1996, he was promoted to Senior Associate Dean of the newly formed College of Agricultural, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences (ACES), a position he held until his retirement in 2002. In retirement, Holt continued to serve the university until 2006 as Interim Director of the National Soybean Research Laboratory.

Holt's career spanned 68 years as a farmer, educator, researcher, and administrator. Through his leadership, he had phenomenal impact on agriculture at the University of Illinois and nationally. He authored or co-authored 13 book chapters, was active in 14 national and international professional and academic organizations, chaired or served as a leading member of 21 separate academic reviews/consultancy projects, and wrote at least 12 interdisciplinary proposals that garnered more than \$260 million to the university for agricultural research and education programs, many of which have enjoyed continued funding to this day.

In addition to ASA, Holt served as president of the Agricultural Research Institute and Gamma Sigma Delta and was a Fellow of AAAS. His leadership and vision helped shape agricultural research nationally and internationally, earning him numerous honors and awards.

Above all, he was deeply devoted to his family and his church where he served as an organist and choir member. Holt took great pride in his heritage, his work with students and colleagues, and his lifelong dedication to agricultural advancement. His legacy endures through those he mentored and inspired. He is survived by his wife, Marilyn, one daughter, two sons, eight grandchildren, and one great-grandson. He was preceded in death by his son, Jeffrey, his parents, and several family members.

[More people news](#)

[Back to issue](#)

[Back to home](#)

. The authors. CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. Except where otherwise noted, images are subject to copyright. Any reuse without express permission from the copyright owner is prohibited.