



In Memoriam

August 8, 2024

Leo M. Walsh

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Former SSSA President and Fellow (along with ASA) Leo M. Walsh, age 93, passed away peacefully on June 27, 2024, in Middleton, WI.

He was born on Jan. 16, 1931 and raised on a diversified family farm near Fort Dodge, IA. At Iowa State University, he received both a B.S. degree in Agricultural Education and a ROTC commission in the U.S. Air Force in 1952. He spent two years on active duty, primarily in Japan, and then taught high school vocational agriculture in Iowa. Through this experience of working with students and local farmers, he realized he needed additional formal education, enrolling in the Department of Soil Science at the University of Wisconsin–Madison (UW) and graduating with a Ph.D. in Soil Science in 1959.

Walsh began his teaching career at the University of Wisconsin–Madison in 1964, first serving as an Assistant Professor in the Soil Science Department and rising through the ranks to eventually become full Professor and Chair. His long and impressive career culminated in his appointment as Dean of the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALS) in 1979, serving in this capacity until 1991.

At CALS, Walsh established several new programs and strengthened international programming in the college. As dean, he also led the development of student and stakeholder research and outreach programs. He also played a key role in the establishment and initial funding of the UW Biotechnology Center and established undergraduate scholarships and a graduate fellowship.

Colleagues praised his deep commitment to agriculture at all levels. In 1982, Walsh became the chair of the Division of Agriculture for the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges. In 1987, President H.W. Bush appointed him to the Board of International Food and Agricultural Development where he advised the United States Agency for International Development on programs to promote sustainable agriculture and natural resource protection in developing nations.

A lectureship was established in his name by the Agronomic Science Foundation—The Leo Walsh Soil Fertility Distinguished Lectureship. Every year since 2005, this lecture has been presented at ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Annual Meeting to highlight academic trailblazers who make significant contributions in the area of soil fertility (see <https://bit.ly/3VXVFzy>).

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