

2020 CA-ASA Honoree: STEVE ORLOFF

University of California Cooperative Extension Farm Advisor

We are honored but saddened to present this honor to Steve Orloff posthumously – an individual who had a large impact on California agriculture and is sorely missed by both friends and family. As a UCCE Farm Advisor, Steve made many contributions to agriculture over three decades, and richly deserves this recognition!

Steve was born to Marty and Carol Orloff in Hollywood, CA in 1956 and lived most of his youth in Lancaster, CA. While not born into a farm family, he developed a love for agriculture through experiences in the Peace Corps, his university training and association with UC, and especially by working closely with farmers.

It was in Southern California that Steve learned to surf the waves and became an expert surfer – a passion he continued throughout his life. Before joining UC, Steve spent two years in Central America serving in the Peace Corps, primarily El Salvador, where he worked with marginal farmers. He was transferred during the civil war in El Salvador to Honduras, where he met his wife-to-be, Islia.

Steve earned a B.S. and M.S. in Crop Science at California State University, San Luis Obispo. He started his career with UC Cooperative Extension as a Farm Advisor in the high desert region in Southern California. In the early 1990s, he became a Farm Advisor in Siskiyou County and later also served as County Director in Siskiyou and Modoc Counties until his passing in October of 2017. He served as a highly valued UC Cooperative Extension Farm Advisor for 33 years!

As a UC Cooperative Extension Farm Advisor, Steve took a special interest weed management. While working in the high desert, he developed an effective weed control program for onions and a comprehensive program for dodder control in alfalfa. More recently his research on yellow starthistle, weed control in seedling alfalfa, evaluation of the Roundup Ready system in alfalfa, and the discovery of injury to Roundup Ready alfalfa from glyphosate were major accomplishments. Because of his important work on dodder control in alfalfa, Russian thistle, and work in onions he was awarded the CWSS Award of Excellence in 1987.

Steve Orloff had a major passion for alfalfa. He published hundreds of articles reporting on his original research related to pest management, irrigation, harvest management, fertilization and variety selection for alfalfa. He was a major contributor to the California Alfalfa & Forage Symposium and Western Alfalfa & Forage Symposia, from the 1980's through 2017, the year of his passing. While he collaborated heavily with others, he also generated much of the data himself in on-farm research projects as well as research at the Intermountain Research and



Steve Orloff (left) was a true educator and teacher, was highly respected for his knowledge and service to agriculture, and enjoyed engaging fully with audiences.

Extension Center. He led the publication of “Intermountain Alfalfa Management” in the 1990s and was a major contributor to the 250 page “Irrigated Alfalfa Management for Desert and Mediterranean Zones” (2008). These are considered leading nationwide (and worldwide) references to management of irrigated alfalfa. He was honored by the California Alfalfa & Forage Association with the ‘Kuhn Leadership Award’ in 2011, and posthumously honored at the Argentina alfalfa meeting in 2018, where his work was deeply appreciated.

In Yreka, Siskiyou County, Steve quickly established himself as a regional expert on many crops, including specialty crops, small grains, pastures, grass hay, alfalfa, and pest management. His work has been highly valued by farmers throughout the Intermountain region as well as state-wide and nationally. Steve made his mark through his strong science, hard work, and commitment to agriculture but also through his sense of humor and his genuine care for his friends, colleagues, and especially his family.

Steve said many times that his job required a steep learning curve, but he was aided by the farmers and ranchers, PCAs, and crop specialists at UC Davis and UC Riverside who appreciated his dedication to solving important problems. He collaborated with and received mentoring from PCA Tim Hayes and Ext. Weed Specialist Dave Cudney and UC Davis Specialist Vern Marble.

Steve had a unique ability to extend information in a fun and easy to understand style. Some remember being hit by Snickers bars for having the right answer to his questions or others for not paying enough attention. Others remember joke slides at others’ expense which nevertheless made his presentations a ‘must attend’! He was a widely sought-after speaker at state-wide and regional events in California, but also at annual grower meetings in New Mexico, Utah, Nebraska, Washington, Arizona, Idaho, Oregon, and Nevada. He was a regular contributor to research presentations at the UC Intermountain Research and Extension Center, and at UC Davis. His thoughtful analysis and presentation of his own research data was always a highlight of any meeting, including his incorporation of humor that always enlivened the crowd. Internationally, Steve gave many talks and conducted programs in alfalfa and agricultural development, including Spain, Romania, Chile, Argentina, China and Mexico.

In addition to his impact as an agricultural scientist, perhaps Steve’s most important attribute was his personal character. He was personal friends to many farmers, industry members and university colleagues. He was valued not only for his many accomplishments, but his ability to light up a room and to engage on nearly every subject. Many colleagues remember his great sense of humor, his dedication to his family, his friendship, and his immense service to agricultural science. Steve is survived by his wife Islia, sons Rob, Michael and Danny, and mother. As colleagues, we are grateful to the support of his family, since it is clear that their support contributed greatly to Steve’s professional success and impact on our industry.

He is sorely missed by all. It is with some considerable sorrow, but with great respect, that we honor our valued colleague and friend Steve Orloff with the 2020 California Plant and Soil Award.

--Dan Putnam, Brad Hanson, and Steve Wright