

## 2020 CA-ASA Honoree: STEVEN D. WRIGHT

### University of California Cooperative Extension Farm Advisor

Growing up in San Diego, it might have made sense for Steve to be attracted to a career on the coast or even on the ocean, but early on he developed an interest in agriculture. He came to the San Joaquin Valley and earned a bachelor's degree in Plant Sciences at CA State University Fresno State (CSUF) in 1972. Upon graduation, Steve and his wife, Neva joined the Peace Corps, and spent three years working with Guatemalan native farmers. While in Guatemala, “I did research and extension work on corn, wheat and potatoes,” Wright said. “That's what motivated me to come back to California and do graduate work at CSU Fresno. I wanted to work in extension.”



Steve Wright, UCCE Farm Advisor – Tulare and Kings Counties

Steve has high praise for the opportunities afforded to him during his college days at CSU Fresno. “They had all kinds of farm projects we could do,” Wright said. “I had grain, cotton and vegetable projects as a student. I was doing everything from planting to harvesting. In addition to working for the school farm and private farms, I owe a lot to the professors there, who offered the applied aspects of farming along with their teaching programs.”

While finishing up his Master's degree in agronomy at CSUF in 1980, Steve started working with UC Cooperative Extension in Tulare County. His education and work experience was immediately applicable on the job, since he was hired to work with cereal crops. With the retirement of multiple UC Farm Advisors in his area in the first few years of his career, other opportunities followed to expand his research and extension efforts to include both weed management and cotton in Tulare and Kings Counties. Besides having a research focus on all aspects of cereals and cotton production, this also gave him a chance to develop expertise in a wide range of weed management projects in rangeland, irrigation districts, the first herbicide-tolerant crops and later herbicide-resistant weed management issues in both annual and permanent crops. His work also included variety evaluations in cotton, sorghum and small grains, industry-sponsored nitrogen management research in small grains and cotton, insect pest management field research, nationally-recognized work on defoliation and harvest aids in cotton, disease resistance studies in cotton, and biofuel crop studies. “The job got bigger and changed all the time,” Wright said. “I enjoyed working in different disciplines, from controlling yellow star thistle in the foothills, to working with large- and small-acreage farmers in Tulare and Kings Counties. I thrived on that.”

After 36 years as an agronomist/weed science advisor with UC Cooperative Extension, Steve June 30, 2016. He authored, co-authored or contributed to 117 peer-reviewed publications, 347 non-peer-reviewed articles, crop cost studies, and 11 book chapters published by UC Agriculture and Natural Resources. He sought out opportunities and volunteered for service in many other countries over the years, including China, Mexico, Congo, India, Uzbekistan and multiple countries in Central America. Steve has taught individual classes as well as courses at CSU Fresno. In service to UC and the industry, he served as a representative, then as president of UC Agriculture and Natural Resources Academic Assembly Council, as a UC ANR Program Council member, and served as President of the California Weed Science Society and has been honored as a lifetime honorary member. Locally, he is pleased to have served the California Youth Soccer Association by helping design and maintain multiple soccer fields in Visalia that may be some of the best in the state.

His career is an impressive combination of individual research and extension accomplishments plus extensive efforts to take part in cooperative team efforts in addressing important research and extension education needs. He is recognized as a cooperator who not only puts his name on cooperative projects, but one who consistently “shows up” to get the job done, and it has been appreciated by his co-workers in many projects. Even with this list of achievements, Wright has said that he counts the relationships developed with local farmers, pest control advisers, consultants, private industry, university researchers, students, UC and county staff as his greatest career accomplishments. “When I think over my career, I think of the people who I was privileged to work with more than the projects” Wright said.

In retirement, Wright and his wife Neva have remained in their long-time home city of Visalia, and so far they have enjoyed new travel adventures, and best of all, more time with family including their daughters and their spouses, and grandchildren. Long walks with both his family and his chocolate Labrador retriever are part of the plan, along with continuing assistance with a few research projects, pursuing his passion for international volunteer work and recreational outdoor activities, including camping, snow skiing, going to Morro Bay, and enjoying time with grandchildren.