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## Richard VanDePol, A Career Example of High-Quality Field Research

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## Richard VanDePol, A Career Example of High-Quality Field Research

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Richard VanDePol, ISU Agricultural Engineering/Agronomy (AEA) Research Farm, co-manager, retired August 2016. He started with ISU in 1977 and retired after 39 years with ag engineering research project management and support. Since 1988, he managed the ag engineering part of the AEA Research Farm near Boone, Iowa, and was well known for his candor and ability to get things done—even the unusual and nearly impossible.

In a state whose economy is driven by agriculture, full-scale real-world field research in plant and animal production and sustainability of soil/water resources is essential. To be successful, it requires not only technical expertise, but dedication. It can be brutally hard work—carried out in the hot sun and in biting winter winds—beyond the protective confines of air conditioned laboratories and offices. It requires support staff who not only understand research, but who also know and appreciate agriculture. Richard VanDePol is a superb example of this type of individual.

Once Richard understood a research project's scientific objectives, he could be counted on as a dependable field research partner who was always there with timely advice on safe and efficient ways to move heavy, large objects; tools and equipment properly maintained and ready to go; and innovative

ideas and fabrication skills to solve unusual problems. He took personal interest in each research project: patrolling research sites and facilities to check for weather-related problems; making sure gates and doors were secured; planning ahead months in advance to ensure adequate materials and equipment were ready for the next season; and keeping research sites mowed, weed-free, and ready for thousands of visitors interested in ISU field research.

His technical support, attention to detail, fabrication skills, and enthusiastic participation played very important roles in the success of many projects. These projects often involved acquiring, transporting, and storing large quantities of natural materials, such as many tons of ground cornstalks, straw, and silage needed when the Iowa Department of Natural Resources asked ISU to study the feasibility of using composting as an environmentally-friendly alternative to burial for emergency disposal of diseased cattle in a homeland biosecurity situation. During the study, Richard also developed safe methods for transporting and positioning cattle carcasses in emergency compost piles and suggested practical land application techniques for the finished compost product.

Richard spearheaded the idea of pooling Ag Engineering and Agronomy shop resources into a larger consolidated shop area that freed space for other project activities at the farm and saved heated shop costs. Richard also made a major contribution to Iowa State University by networking with regional equipment dealers, shops, and subcontractors for other departments. He knew where to go and who to talk to in agricultural and heavy equipment fabrication. His support of

extension projects with Successful Farming magazine and an award-winning planter video with Pioneer continue to result in additional projects that leverage visibility for Iowa State University.

Richard performed these many and varied tasks with enthusiasm and without needing to be reminded. In fact, he often reminded researchers of things they overlooked. He was a key factor in making sure students working at the farm shop followed appropriate safety procedures. The Ag Engineering/Agronomy Research Farm shop was always safe, clean, and ready for public visitors.

Richard VanDePol was a long-time managerial force who helped transform the ISU Ag Engineering/Agronomy Research Farm into a major field research site serving multiple projects and researchers. He influenced many individuals and projects in a deep and positive way and, in doing so, set an enduring example for the future of high-quality field research.