

**MEMORIAL RESOLUTION OF THE FACULTY  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON**

**ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR FREDERICK H. BUTTEL**

Fred Buttel hoped he was always a “fundamentally decent human being,” and he was. In the academic world with more than its share of over-inflated egos and outrageous arrogance, Fred was a modest man. He was the co-author of four books and across his career published some 230 scholarly articles and book chapters. He was the co-editor of 9 volumes, and his work fundamentally changed the face of rural sociology, powerfully influenced environmental sociology, and has a prominent place in science and technology studies. And yet when he was toasted at a symposium last August in his honor, scholars from around the country and around the world remembered him as an extraordinary mentor and steadfast friend, somebody who always had time for graduate students and junior scholars and made the careers of not a few of them.

Frederick H. Buttel was born in Freeport, Illinois on October 15, 1948, the son of a farmer and a school teacher. His life in higher education began and ended at the University of Wisconsin--Madison. He received his BS from the UW in 1970. He received a masters degree in sociology from the UW in 1972, and then spent a year at Yale--getting a masters degree in environmental studies--before returning to the UW for his Ph.D. He did short stints on the faculties at Michigan State and Ohio State before landing at Cornell, where he taught from 1978 through 1991.

It was while at Cornell that Fred published *The Rural Sociology of the Advanced Societies* (1980) with Howard Newby. It is not an exaggeration to say that book remade and revitalized a field of inquiry many viewed as moribund. In that volume and subsequent work, Buttel gave attention to problems of structured inequality and power in agriculture, initiating what was then called the “new rural sociology.” His book with Craig Humphrey, *Environment, Energy, and Society* (1982), played a major role in bringing the environment to the attention of sociologists and making it a legitimate subject for sociological study.

In 1992, Fred returned to the University of Wisconsin to run the Agricultural Technology and Family Farm Institute and join the faculties of Rural Sociology and Environmental Studies. At ATFFI, he developed a professional staff and built viable partnerships. Under Fred’s leadership, ATFFI’s research and extension work became clearly focused, and the institute, renamed the Program for Agricultural Technology Studies, emerged as a highly valued source for quantitative data on themes that cut across disciplines, organizations and vested interests.

During his time at Wisconsin, he was a leader in the sociological study of agricultural biotechnology as well as in the area of agriculture and globalization. In these areas, he collaborated with colleagues across campus. He helped develop and actively participated in several UW programs, including Science and Technology Studies, where he served on the program steering committee, the Center on World Affairs and the Global Economy, where he was a senior fellow, and the Development Studies Program, where he was an affiliated faculty member. From 1998 to 2002, Fred served as chair of the Department of Rural Sociology.

A superstar since early in his career, Fred was elected a fellow of the AAAS while still in his thirties, and he subsequently received awards from an array of organizations: the Distinguished Rural Sociologist Award (2004, Rural Sociology Society), the Award for Excellence in Research (1993, Rural Sociology Society), the Award for Distinguished Contributions (1994, Section on Environment and Technology, American Sociological Association, 1994), and the Merit Award (1999, Natural Resources Research Group, Rural Sociology Society). In 2004, Fred received one of the University of Wisconsin’s highest honors, selection as a Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation Professor.

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Fred was deeply committed to serving the broader scholarly community. He served as president of the Rural Sociology Society, and president of the Agriculture, Food and Human Values Society. He served in a host other elected posts for organizations ranging from the American Association for the Advancement of Science to the American Sociological Association (ASA) and served the University of Wisconsin community in a wide range of capacities.

Fred was a public intellectual before Russell Jacoby popularized the term in the late 1980s. He was as at home with farmers and activists as with politicians and sociologists and worked with all of them in search of a more humane world.

Frederick H. Buttel died on January 14, 2005 after more than a decade long fight with neurofibromosarcoma, a cancer of the fibrous tissues surrounding the spinal cord. He is survived by his wife, Pam Clinkenbeard, a daughter, Allison Buttel, a sister, Barbara MacQueen, a niece, Heather MacQueen, and a nephew, Rod MacQueen.

MEMORIAL COMMITTEE  
For the Department of Rural Sociology,  
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