

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

**ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR EMERITUS VILAS W. MATTHIAS**

Vilas William Matthias (Matt), professor emeritus, College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, died at the age of 90 on Saturday, June 18, 2005 at the Don and Marilyn Anderson Hospice Center in Madison, Wisconsin. The son of a farm couple, Matt was born in the family farm home to Marie (Clausen) Matthias and William Matthias on March 2, 1915 in Manitowoc County, Wisconsin. After graduating from Valders High School, he attended Mission House College (now Lakeland College). On September 9, 1939 he was married to Gladys Wehrwein and both attended the UW-Madison where he received a B.S. degree in agricultural education in 1942. He received his M. S. degree in agricultural extension and education at the UW in 1955.

Following graduation in 1942, he worked briefly as a vocational agriculture instructor at Plainfield and Columbus High Schools. Then he was appointed to the position of assistant county agent in Rock County, Wisconsin which he held until 1947. In that year Matt was chosen to become the superintendent of the Madison area field research facilities. Some of these facilities were located on the campus, but a sizeable portion was located in what became known as the Hill Farms and Hilldale. These facilities supported much of the field research guided by the college's research faculty and staff.

As the city of Madison grew and enveloped the Hill Farms, an administrative decision was made to dispose of the property and to relocate on the Arlington Prairie at the juncture of Dane and Columbia Counties near the hamlet of Leeds. In 1955 Professor Matthias was chosen to lead this transfer and was assigned the title of superintendent of the Arlington and Madison farms. Under his able direction and management this new farm, the largest of the university's research stations (over 2000 acres), was developed into one of the finest field research and education centers in the nation. Complemented by the various land areas remaining in the Madison area, the Arlington farm became the site of wide-ranging field research projects of a basic and applied nature. These investigations involve the talents and energies of dozens of agricultural scientists, supported by scores of technicians and graduate students, for whom the facilities and proximity to the Madison campus are the principle loci of their field research efforts.

The Arlington facility is now called the Arlington Agricultural Research Station. It bears little resemblance to the twelve private farm properties that first met Matt's eyes in the mid-50's. The job of molding twelve small farms into an efficient working field research and educational unit was formidable. Among the very first tasks was the planning of a complete soil and water conservation program for the new facility. In this process he realigned all fields and applied appropriate management practices for their proper maintenance and care. The plan was finished and construction was completed before new research plots were installed. The conservation plan has been a model for use in teaching students and farmers.

Throughout his tenure as superintendent, Professor Matthias had been intimately involved in the planning of most of the many buildings that have been constructed and remodeled at the Arlington/Madison stations. This responsibility has entailed close working relationships with the academic departments concerned and with building specialists in the Department of Biological Systems Engineering as well as with contractors and state agency personnel. Two projects were especially complicated and demanded much of his time and skill. One was the feed processing facility at Arlington in which he affected the design and construction of one of the most flexible and useful research ration production units ever built. Another project is known as the Public Events Facility at Arlington which offers appropriate space for meetings, dinners, cattle sales, machinery shows and car auctions.

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Matt also provided vital on-the-scene direction relative to the uses made of the Arlington facility for planning and programming the many field days, tours and special educational events. In these activities, he was usually found working in close association with Madison campus faculty. One of his favorite groups was the Madison Friends of International Students for which he helped plan Sunday afternoon picnics for the foreign students and their hosts at Arlington. Also many visitations by people from all walks of life, including Wisconsin citizens and residents from other states and countries were accommodated by him directly. And whether cast in the role of program planner, tour guide, teacher, extension specialist or researcher, his enthusiasm, sincerity, intimate and practical knowledge of the farms and farming operations made him unusually effective as an agricultural educator.

From 1980 to 1982, he helped to develop and to supervise the construction of the USDA Dairy Forage Research field research facility at Sauk Prairie on what was called the Badger Ordinance Works. This facility supports the research efforts of federal and university researchers located on the Madison campus.

His natural interest in people was stimulated by the many visitors to the Arlington Station from foreign lands and inspired him to serve as a tour leader for a number of "People to People" tours into Europe, Russia, Australia, New Zealand, Korea and Africa. He had the rare opportunity to meet people and observe the agriculture in other countries and, in the process, to engender good will and to communicate information of agricultural interest abroad. His tour leadership won for him many friends among the Americans who toured with him and the foreign people they visited.

He took an active part in the life and affairs of his community, particularly in his church and through membership in civic organizations where he held numerous offices and positions of responsibility. Matt loved hunting, fishing, tree farming, traveling, camping and sharing his love of the outdoors with others. He is survived by his wife, Gladys, two daughters, Donna Weilhofen and Beverly Koop, and a son, William.

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