

# Dr. Robert E. Wagner, Retired President of PPI, Passes Away at Age 90

Dr. Robert E. “Bob” Wagner, who served as President of the Potash & Phosphate Institute (PPI) from 1975 to 1988, passed away March 31, 2011. PPI was the forerunner organization of the International Plant Nutrition Institute (IPNI).

“Dr. Wagner will be remembered as an energetic and forward-looking leader, one who understood the importance of agronomic research, the fertilizer industry, and production agriculture,” said Dr. Terry L. Roberts, IPNI President. “He practiced and believed in the power of positive thinking and he leaves a



**Well known for his success** in building agronomic understanding around the world, Dr. Wagner (right) is shown at an international conference in 1986 with Prof. Xie Jianchang of the Nanjing Institute of Soil Science.

great legacy in the many people whose lives he improved.” After retiring as President of the Institute at the end of 1988, Dr. Wagner and his wife, Bernice, lived at Stone Mountain, Georgia. He is also survived by their three

sons (Bob, Jr., Jim, and Doug) and their wives, and five grandchildren. Dr. Wagner remained active with many interests after retiring from PPI, including fulfillment of a lifelong dream in developing a top quality herd of purebred cattle on his farm south of Atlanta. A native of Garden City, Kansas, Dr. Wagner was born March 6, 1921. He received his B.S. degree in Agronomy at Kansas State University in 1942. He earned his M.S. at the University of Wisconsin in 1943 and worked as a Forage Crops Specialist in Kansas and as an Associate Agronomist with USDA before completing his Ph.D. at the University of Wisconsin in 1950. After becoming leader of a USDA pasture and range research project, Dr. Wagner was named chairman of the Department of Agronomy at the University of Maryland in 1956.



**Dr. Wagner and wife Bernice** were married for 63 years. They are shown here at Christmas in 2007.

In 1959, he joined the staff of the American Potash Institute (forerunner of PPI and IPNI) and became a vice president of the organization. From 1967 to 1975, he served as Director of the University of Maryland Cooperative Extension Service.

During his tenure as president of the Institute, there were many important

advances. When membership was extended to phosphate producers in 1977, the name of the organization became the Potash & Phosphate Institute. Dr. Wagner also served as president of the Foundation for Agronomic Research (FAR).

Among his many honors, Dr. Wagner was elected Fellow of the American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America, Soil Science Society of America, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He was the author of numerous technical papers and popular publications and was a popular speaker and panel member at a tremendous number of events. He travelled extensively in various responsibilities during his career and is well-remembered around the world.

In 1985, Dr. Wagner was honored with the Distinguished Service in Agriculture Award, presented by Kansas State University. The award recognizes individuals who have made outstanding contributions in a professional field or public service related to agriculture.

Always working toward greater profitability for farmers, Dr. Wagner was a long-time proponent of the concepts of Maximum Yield Research (MYR) and Maximum Economic Yield (MEY). He also championed the ideas of more balanced nutrient



**During an early visit to China**, Dr. Wagner communicated with this group of young people.

application rates and the power of nutrient interactions. He encouraged researchers to try innovative approaches.

Dr. Wagner served as a member of the Board of Directors and as President of the American Forage and Grassland Council. He was a member of the steering committee for the Fertilizer Industry Advisory Committee of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations.

From 1976 to 1997, Dr. Wagner served on the Board of Directors of IFDC (An International Center for Soil Fertility and Agricultural Development). He was a member of the Executive Committee and Program Committee. IFDC President and Chief Executive Officer Dr. Amit Roy spoke for many in expressing his sympathy to the family, noting that in addition to his long and illustrative career in agriculture, Dr. Wagner was active in his community, his church, and the interests of his children and grandchildren. **DC**



**Dr. Robert E. Wagner**