

Darrell Watts

2004 Maurice Kremer Groundwater Achievement Award Winner

Dr. Darrell Watts, retired professor of biological systems engineering with the University of Nebraska was selected as the recipient of the 2004 Maurice Kremer Groundwater Achievement Award. This award is presented annually to an individual who has made a substantive, life-long contribution to the conservation and protection of Nebraska's groundwater.

The Groundwater Foundation's President Susan Seacrest cited Dr. Watts' contributions in research, education, and public service. "Much of what we know today about the fate and transport of nitrates in groundwater, we know because of Dr. Watts' pioneering research. His field research in irrigation and groundwater conservation led directly to our current understanding about the importance of careful stewardship and maintaining a healthy environment while growing the food on which the world depends." Nominators Jim Goeke and Robert Kuzelka described Dr. Watts' career as "instrumental in creating real-world water management solutions and benefits for many diverse audiences and using education as a way to understand and protect groundwater."

Dr. Watts' university career has been marked by significant contributions internationally. For example, in 1995 and 1996 Dr. Watts served as a consultant on irrigation efficiency to agriculture organizations in Brazil and Argentina and has evaluated research in water conservation for several national and international groups such as US Agency for International Development. He has had a major impact in enhancing food production through improved water management and the development of educational and research programs in Chile, Morocco, Ethiopia, and Colombia. He has also benefited irrigated agriculture in Russia, Nigeria, and Brazil.

Over the past decade, Dr. Watts has been the department's leader in arranging and hosting student and faculty exchanges with Chile, Argentina, and Brazil. He sponsored 12 students from Chile over a 5-year period to conduct irrigation research for their senior theses. Over the semester break of 2001-2002, he lead nine Nebraska students and three faculty on a study tour of Chile. Through his efforts in South America, more than a dozen students have come to the University of Nebraska for graduate study. In addition, his teaching career at the University has inspired many students to pursue careers in agriculture and natural resource management.

Dr. Watts' international focus has brought tangible benefits to Nebraska as well. For example, Dr. Watts was a key contributor to achieving a sustainable water management plan for the Upper Republican Natural Resource District. His widely known academic and service oriented projects have connected Nebraska's agricultural methods and products to a larger international audience. Seacrest notes that "Thanks to Dr. Watts' pioneering efforts, Nebraska has always played an important role in feeding the world and our increasingly global economy."

The award was presented Monday, November 22, 2004 in conjunction with the Nebraska Water Resources Association and Nebraska State Irrigation Association's Annual Conference at the Holiday Inn Convention Center in Kearney, Nebraska.