

2011

JIM KUHN LEADERSHIP AWARD

*California Alfalfa & Forage Association,
Representing the Forage Growers of California*

Steve Orloff, University of California Cooperative Extension Farm Advisor

The Board of Directors of the California Alfalfa & Forage Association (CAFA) is pleased to select Steve Orloff as the 2011 recipient of the Jim Kuhn Leadership Award. The Jim Kuhn Leadership Award is presented annually to a person or organization for their lasting contributions to the California alfalfa industry. The award was established in 2005 when Kuhn, an industry icon and forage innovator, was killed in a vehicle accident near his ranch in El Centro, CA. Nominees are judged on their knowledge of alfalfa, record of leadership and the extent and depth of their contributions to the California alfalfa industry.



Steve Orloff has a long history with alfalfa, and is a true leader for this crop. He grew up in Lancaster, California, and in Southern California, where he learned to appreciate the agriculture still existing in the high-desert communities of Los Angeles County. Los Angeles County was once the largest agricultural county in the nation, and still has some production in the high desert region, primarily alfalfa, grains, orchards and specialty crops. It was also in Southern California that Steve learned to surf the waves, literally, and became an expert surfer – a passion he continues to cultivate today.

Steve spent several years in Central America serving in the Peace Corps, primarily El Salvador, where he worked with marginal farmers struggling to survive in this tropical, crowded region. He met his wife-to-be in Honduras during this period. After graduation with an MS in Crop Sciences from San Louis Obispo, Steve took the University of California Farm Advisor position at Lancaster, CA. Although he intimates that his first years at the job required a steep learning curve on his part, he says he was aided by the many experts in crop production in the region, farmers and ranchers, PCAs, and crop specialists at UC Davis.

From the very start, Steve showed a love and penchant for alfalfa and its many agronomic attributes. He conducted a wide range of studies on alfalfa weed management, varieties, harvesting, quality, and economics. Since alfalfa was (and remains) a major crop for the high

desert, his expertise became readily apparent. He conducted careful studies of the control of dodder, a major weed in alfalfa production in California, and his studies during the 1980s became the gold standard for management strategies for this difficult parasitic weed.

After his stint in the high desert region, Steve made a momentous change in his life-to move his young family, now with three children, from the desert to the mountains of California, to take a position in agronomic crops at the UC Cooperative Extension office in Yreka, Siskiyou County. In many respects, this was a good fit- given the dominance of alfalfa as a major crop, the confluence of wheat rotations, pasture, and specialty crops, the importance of irrigation were similar to that of Lancaster. There Steve quickly established himself as a regional expert, a state-wide expert on alfalfa, conducting significant research on-farm as well as at the UC Intermountain Research and Extension Center at Tulelake, CA.

Steve Orloff has published more than 74 articles in the California and Western Alfalfa Symposia, spanning the period from 1984 through 2011. These dealt with a wide range of critical issues for alfalfa, including weed management, cutting schedules, irrigation, fertilization, and varieties. He also has a large number of other refereed and non-refereed publications that are of significance – including the “Intermountain Alfalfa Management” book, which he led in the 1990s, and his significant contributions to the “Irrigated Alfalfa Management for Desert and Mediterranean Zones”. These remain permanent contributions to the collective knowledge about this important crop.

Steve is widely sought after speaker at symposia, including this Western Alfalfa Conference, given his thoughtful analysis and presentation of his own research data. In addition to his contributions to alfalfa, Steve has conducted research on small grains, onions, vegetable crops, and irrigation and soil fertility issues. He has given talks and conducted programs in alfalfa in foreign countries including Spain, Romania, Chile, China and Mexico.

It is with great pleasure that CAFA awards its annual Jim Kuhn Leadership award to Steve Orloff, UC Cooperative Extension Farm Advisor for Siskiyou County, who has exhibited extraordinary lasting contributions and leadership to the alfalfa industry.

--Dan Putnam, Aaron Kiess, CAFA Board