Professor Emeritus Madison J. Wright passed away on April 27, 2019 in Ithaca, New York. Madison was born on April 9, 1924 in Washington, DC, the son of Elvira and Carlton Wright (Admiral of WWII fame). His undergraduate work was in chemistry at the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill from 1942-44 and 46-47. He served as an electronics technician in the Naval Reserve from 1944-46. He received his doctorate in agronomy and botany from the University of Wisconsin – Madison in 1952. He was appointed assistant professor of forage crops (production and management of crops to feed livestock) at UWM and held that position until 1959. He then became associate professor of agronomy at Cornell University, specializing in research and teaching of forage crops. Professor Wright was promoted to full professor in 1968. He was chairman of the Department of Agronomy at Cornell from 1970 to 1975. Before becoming department chairman, he worked with colleagues in the college to develop experimental field trip courses around the United States and then in foreign countries. This program helped establish Cornell’s prominence in international agriculture. Subsequent field courses in international agriculture development are still being taught today. While department chair, Professor
Wright used aerial tours for new faculty from other parts of the world to help them become familiar with the diversity of agriculture in New York State. He also fostered very productive research exchanges with other countries of which the seed science program with Poland was exceptional.

After his term as department chair, Professor Wright focused on international agriculture and taught the Cornell course on tropical crops. He also became the extension and research leader for Cornell in oilseed crops, focusing on soybean. Professor Wright is credited with the reintroduction of soybean to New York agriculture. At the start of that work, soybean was a minor crop in New York State, but based on his work, soybean is now a crop of major importance here. His reflections on this and other aspects of his career can be viewed in the joint presentation with Professor Tom Scott at ecommons.cornell.edu.

Always a servant citizen of the groups to which he belonged, Professor Wright received several recognitions for his contributions to the college, the university, and New York State agriculture. In 1976, he was elected as a Fellow of the American Society of Agronomy, its highest honor. In 1990, he received the Career Service Award of the Northeast Branch of the American Society of Agronomy. Professor Wright had retired in 1989.

His extra-professional contributions include 16 years as a county representative to the Central New York Resource Conservation and Development project. He also served for several years on his local Environmental Management Council and worked as a volunteer with the Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Service. Professor Wright had 40 years of membership and active service with the First Congregational Church of Ithaca. He also helped to start the “Information Outposts” to provide travel directions to students and parents as they arrived in Ithaca at the start of Cornell’s fall term. As a resident of Kendal at Ithaca, he was active in the Ithaca Woodshop Committee and was declared to be their “Screw-Master General Emeritus” in 2018.

Professor Wright is survived by his wife Mary, four children (David,
Martha, Bill, and Sarah) and five grandchildren. He will be remembered as a catalyst in innovation and as a model gentleman.

Written by Gary W. Fick, William J. Cox, and Ralph L. Obendorf