Donald (Don) K. Freebairn. passed away on November 26, 2021. Born in LaSalle, Illinois, January 30, 1929, he earned a B.S. in Agriculture in 1950 and an M.S. in Agricultural Economics in 1952, both from the University of Illinois. He then came to Cornell University, where he completed his Ph.D. in Agricultural Economics in 1957. Don then spent several years working for the Rockefeller Foundation as an agricultural economist in Latin America, with assignments on faculty at the National School of Agriculture in Chapingo, and in multiple roles within the National Agricultural Research Institute in Mexico’s Ministry of Agriculture. Don joined the Cornell faculty as an Associate Professor without tenure in February 1964, filling a vacancy left by Professor Solon Barraclough. He was conferred an appointment with indefinite tenure effective July 1970. Don retired from the Cornell faculty in summer 1987 as an Associate Professor in the Department of Agricultural Economics and a member of the International Agriculture Program of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Don was then awarded the title Professor Emeritus of Agricultural Economics and of Latin American Studies.

Don spent sabbatical leaves at Cambridge University in England in 1971-72 on a highly selective John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship, and at Centro de Economia Agricola in Chapingo, Mexico, on a prestigious Fulbright-Hays Scholarship in 1978-79. He spent the summer of 1974 as a Visiting Professor at the University of Puerto Rico.

During his 23-plus-year career on the Cornell faculty, Don’s scholarship and teaching focused on the economics of agricultural development in Latin America, Mexico in particular. His principal research topics concerned land reform, institutional change, and
resource productivity. Underscoring both his fluency in Spanish and his commitment to communicate his research findings to Latin American audiences, half of his published papers were in Spanish. Don was exceptionally widely connected and well-respected by experts in and on Mexico. The interdisciplinary nature of that work often led him to collaborate with Cornell faculty from other units and disciplines. The clarity of Don’s writing was an asset in facilitating such interdisciplinary work.

Don taught a range of courses in agricultural economics and international agriculture, at both undergraduate and graduate levels. He played a significant role in training a generation of Mexican agricultural economists and in helping other Mexican agricultural scientists understand how economic principles might inform their own research. Throughout his time at Cornell, Don was very actively involved in the Latin American Studies Program (LASP), including serving as the program’s Director both from 1967-71 and again from 1975-79. In the words of the late Knight Professor Emeritus of International Studies Milton Esman, who served as Director of the Center for International Studies that includes LASP, Don “provided steady and conscientious leadership to an important activity with a large student and faculty constituency. He was successful in securing both government and corporate financial support for the program at a time when other area studies programs on campus were struggling.” He was especially effective in securing funding for graduate students working on Latin American agricultural issues.

Don taught both undergraduate and graduate courses and was a valued and respected adviser of both undergraduate and graduate students. As his M.S. advisee, Professor Scott Swinton ‘83, recalls “Don Freebairn was more than a mentor; he enabled me to realize a dream. I chose Cornell’s Department of Agricultural Economics in 1980 because it was one of two in the nation where M.S. students occasionally conducted field research in developing countries. Don Freebairn made that elusive goal possible for me. Rather than scoff, Don encouraged.” Indeed, he facilitated graduate student field research in Mexico financially, including seemingly contributing his
personal resources to help students make ends meet, and took time to personally host students at his in-laws’ home in Mexico and to introduce students to his extensive network of professional contacts throughout Mexico.

The late CALS Dean Emeritus Kennedy therefore naturally described Don as “a warm and friendly person … able to see beyond the narrow framework of specific rules and to understand the needs of students and faculty. … He is a good listener and an effective critic.” Don was therefore drafted to serve on various committees, perhaps most notably on a university-wide curriculum committee to evaluate current offerings and identify gaps in lecture or seminar courses with substantive international content.

Beyond his service at Cornell, Don also served as an Associate Editor of the *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* for the volumes published from 1975 through 1977. In that era, associate editors were essentially coeditors. Thus, Don handled about 25% of the submissions and the other Associate Dick Boisvert 25%. Each worked relatively independently selecting reviewers and making decisions. Editor Bill Tomek observed that Don was intelligent and widely read and that he was sympathetic to interdisciplinary papers. The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations regularly engaged Don as an expert consultant on various matters concerning Latin America.

Don is survived by his children, Elizabeth Freebairn, Ken Freebairn, and William Freebairn.

*Written by Chris Barrett*