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Flinchbaugh inducted into National Ag Hall of Fame

Beloved K-State agricultural economics professor honored posthumously

By Pat Melgares, K-State Research and Extension news service

BONNER SPRINGS, Kan. – Barry Flinchbaugh, a beloved figure during a 49-year career in agricultural policy at Kansas State University and in national farm politics, was inducted posthumously into the National Agriculture Hall of Fame on Oct. 5.

Flinchbaugh, who passed away in November 2020, was represented by his wife, Cathy, during ceremonies held in Bonner Springs, Kansas.

Flinchbaugh was well known as one of the country’s leading experts on agricultural policy and agricultural economics. For more than four decades, he was a top advisor to politicians of both major political parties, including Secretaries of Agriculture, chairs of the House and Senate Agriculture committees, and numerous senators and state governors.

He was involved to some degree in every U.S. Farm Bill written since 1968 and served on many national boards, advisory groups and task forces, providing input on domestic food and agricultural policy.

“When it comes to agricultural policy in Kansas, the United States and internationally, say one word -- Flinchbaugh -- and anyone who has been involved in any way with or studied agricultural policy in the last half century knows exactly who you are talking about,” said Mike Seyfert, a former Flinchbaugh student who is currently the president and Chief Executive Officer of the National Grain and Feed Association.

"Barry was not political with a capital 'P', but his fingerprints were on virtually every piece of major agricultural legislation for a 50-year period."
Kansas Secretary of Agriculture Mike Beam called Flinchbaugh "a continuous student of the current financial status of the American farmer."

"He was a shining example of being non-partisan and fact-based when reacting to agricultural policy concepts. His authority on agricultural issues made him a trusted advisor to many people in the policy arena."

Flinchbaugh served as chair of the Commission on 21st Century Production Agriculture, which was authorized in the 1996 Federal Activities Inventory Reform (FAIR) Act, also known as the Freedom to Farm Act.

"There were leaders who loved Barry and there were some who he made mad as hell," Seyfert remembers. "But they all agreed that he was one of the brightest minds he ever met."

Since coming to Kansas State University in 1971, Flinchbaugh taught a 400-level course in agricultural policy and served as an agricultural economist for extension. He taught more than 5,000 students, and his former students include governors, members of the house and senate, staff for agricultural trade organizations, lobbyists, professors, deans, county commissioners and school board members.

He is remembered for his impactful storytelling style and his tremendous commitment to his students and those he served throughout the state. Until his death in 2020, Flinchbaugh received approximately 100 speaking invitations a year and authored 100-plus publications, including an agricultural policy textbook.

"He was one of a kind; there will never be another Barry Flinchbaugh," said Ernie Minton, the Eldon Gideon Dean of K-State's College of Agriculture. "I don't believe any incoming faculty member would be able to pull off what Barry pulled off so expertly for so many years."

Flinchbaugh was inducted into this year's National Agriculture Hall of Fame class alongside fellow Kansan Junius Groves, who was born into slavery but built a successful farm and other businesses near Edwardsville, Kansas in the early 1900s; and Fabiola Cabeza de Baca, a Spanish-speaking pioneer in agriculture and the cooperative extension service in New Mexico prior to her death in 1991.

Cathy Flinchbaugh said her late husband "would just love" being recognized by the Hall of Fame.

"He was so involved with agriculture that this would be the highlight of his career," she said.

The National Agricultural Center and Hall of Fame was chartered by the U.S. Congress in 1960 to serve as the national agricultural museum and memorial to farming leaders. Its mission is to provide education on the historical and present value of American agriculture, and to honor leadership in agribusiness and academia.

The museum is open April through October from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays. More information is available online, or by sending email to info@AgHallofFame.com.

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National Agricultural Center and Hall of Fame, https://www.aghalloffame.com

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Story by:
Pat Melgares
melgares@ksu.edu