Stephen Wilhelm, 1919 to 2002

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Stephen Wilhelm was born 19 April 1919 in Imperial, California and died 15 July 2002 in Walnut Creek, California. He is survived by his wife Betty and his sons Paul and Nick. Steve Wilhelm was an undergraduate student at the University of California, Los Angeles from 1941 to 1944 and served in the United States Army during World War II. Dr. Wilhelm was a professor of plant pathology at the University of California, Berkeley, CA, where he also did his graduate

work. Steve Wilhelm left a legacy in California because of his capacity to produce not only publications demonstrating his basic research accomplishments, but also to produce tangible results of that research. Growers of strawberries, cotton, olives, bush berries, and raspberries, and scientists working with these crops, have been able to put his recommendations into practice, as well as take advantage of the germ plasm he has made available. Growers not only admired and respected his work, but also realized tangible gains from his research. He became known because of his success controlling *Verticillium* wilt. His studies led him to realize the value of the fumigant chloropicrin in the chemical control of the disease. Before he endorsed the commercial use of chloropicrin, he studied its proper application, as well as its action and relationship to normal soil. Chloropicrin's effect on the environment became a high priority in these studies. He not only tried to encourage, but actually participated in the introductions into several crops of tolerance and resistance genes to *Verticillium* wilt disease. He was enthusiastic and tenacious as he struggled to

introduce cultivars carrying resistance to this disease. The cotton industry will not soon forget his work as he battled the California One-cotton Law that prohibited commercial use of multiple cotton cultivars in California. Strawberries' dependence on a healthy rhizosphere became one of his challenges, and led him to study all phases of microbiology, not just *Verticillium* wilt pathogens. His publications demonstrated his understanding of the value of the biological balance that occurs in healthy soils. The commercial success of soil fumigation and the strawberry industry owe much to his investigation of soil pathogens and their relationship with host root systems. His study of the strawberry led to the publication with J. E. Sagen of "A History of the Strawberry from Ancient Gardens to Modern Markets" (1974, U.C. Press). Through the translations of European work published in the 1700s, they were able to shed light on the origin of our present strawberry. Steve Wilhelm was an excellent communicator to everyone, including growers, students, and fellow colleagues. He had great respect for growers and took their observations seriously. Steve taught a course at Berkeley called The Principles of Plant Pathology, where his habit was to emphasize the history of a plant disease and how it had been controlled and then contrast that to how it is controlled today. When he retired from the University of California, he became the Raspberry Breeder for the Sweet Briar Company, which later became a part of Driscoll Strawberries, Inc., in California.

At the time of his death, more than 50% of the fresh raspberries consumed in the United States were produced from cultivars developed by Dr. Wilhelm. We in California will enjoy the memories of Steve as a person, as well as benefit from his research publications (over 300) and his many reports to the Strawberry Commission of California. He was a mentor to many, both scientifically and spiritually.