

The Passing of Ken Stalder

Dr. Ken Stalder passed away unexpectedly on October 24, 2022. Ken was a mentor, colleague, collaborator, and friend to many, many people.

Ken Stalder grew up on a small diversified farm in Southeast Iowa and went to school in the Fairfield Community School system. He developed his interest in livestock through 4-H and FFA youth activities. He was active in leadership roles in both organizations while also actively participating in swine and beef projects. These projects led him to showing market pigs and market steers at the Jefferson County Fair.

After graduation from high school, Ken began his collegiate journey at Iowa State University in the 2-year Farm Operations program that at the time offered an associate's degree. He graduated from this program in 1985, in the middle of what many called the first farm crisis of our generation. Ken realized that his dream of going back to the family farm was likely not possible and decided to further his education by pursuing his Bachelor of Science degree in Animal Science at Iowa State University. During his first semester, Ken met Dr. Lauren Christian, who taught the Pork Production course. Ken was fortunate that, when he asked, Dr. Christian agreed to be his academic advisor. The relationship became much more than academic advisor over the years. Ken worked his way through school and, needing a job, Dr. Christian helped him find work at the Iowa Swine Testing Station, which stimulated his interest in performance testing, genetic improvement, purebred livestock, and the overall swine industry as well as the wonderful, insightful, and brilliant people engaged in it. Ken was involved with everything from daily care of the animals to data collection while working part time at the Testing Station.

Ken graduated with his B.S. degree in Animal Science and went to work for a large coop in Northeast Iowa as Livestock Production Specialist. His role was to sell feed and provide nutritional and management advice to the livestock producers he served. During his 3-year sales career, Ken conducted several on-farm demonstration projects looking at animal performance when fed different diets. His passion for the demonstration projects allowed him to identify his interest in applied research. While working in Cascade, Iowa, Ken met his future wife, Cheryl Burns, who was a music teacher at a private school in town.

Understanding that he had a great interest in research and really enjoyed working with numbers, Ken desired to learn more about animal breeding, so he went to Western Kentucky University where he began work on a Master of Science degree. While there, Ken studied the immune response difference between pure- and crossbred animals. His study at WKU, led to the development of a life-long friendship with Dr. Gordon Jones after earning his MS degree.

Ken returned to ISU to pursue his PhD in Animal Breeding. As part of his assistantship, he was responsible for working with all the remaining boar testing stations, entering their performance information and providing genetic evaluation services to enhance the information provided to producer when they made



their selection decisions. Ken worked with the test station managers to make sure they submitted the breeding values in time to be published in the sale catalog. He was fortunate to be a student during that time because he was involved with many projects conducted by the National Pork Producers Council including the Terminal and Maternal line tests and many others. This allowed graduate students, including Ken, to gain a tremendous amount of knowledge about accurate data collection, meat quality, statistical analyses, etc., and Ken made many close lifelong friends.

After completing his PhD, Ken went to work as Extension Swine Specialist at the University of Tennessee, based out of the West Tennessee Experiment Station in Jackson. During his work there, he served swine producers across the state of Tennessee and quickly learned that he needed to become well versed in a variety of topics including Ag Economics, Ag Engineering, Swine Nutrition and others. To that end, Ken was very successful at the University of Tennessee assisting producers with their gilt replacement program and helping purebred breeders with their on-farm testing and selection programs by serving as ultrasound service provider. Additionally, he began to focus on the economic importance of sow longevity or sow productive lifetime.

Ken worked at the University of Tennessee from 1995 to 2003 and then was selected to fill a vacant Extension Swine Specialist's position at ISU. After returning to ISU, he continued to work with the large pork production systems operating in Iowa and maintained a successful research and teaching program.

While at ISU, Ken developed and established a nationally and internationally recognized research program in applied swine breeding and genetics, centered especially on sow longevity/sow productive lifetime. His research program was funded almost entirely by extramural grants and gifts. Through these funded research projects, he trained 18 MS, 6 PhD, and 12 post-graduate students. Nearly all these students have gone on to make significant contributions to the swine industry in the U.S. and throughout the world. Additionally, he had many outstanding undergraduate students work on a variety of research projects, which allowed these students to gain an appreciation for the research atmosphere, many going on to professional or graduate school. Ken established a large network of collaborations with colleagues within ISU; at other universities throughout the U.S.; and with commodity groups, government research agencies, private industry, and a variety of international organizations. He published in 39 internationally recognized journals where he authored or co-authored over 160 refereed journal publications. His work has been cited over 3800 times. Additionally, he authored or co-authored 12 book chapters, 14 peer-reviewed extension publications, and over 360 other publications including popular press articles, conference proceedings, research reports, and others. Ken presented over 175 invited talks at scientific meetings and conferences in the U.S. and internationally. He was the winner of many prestigious awards in Animal Science and Animal Breeding and Genetics and from ISU. Ken was promoted to full professor, and he was group leader for the Animal Breeding and Genetics group within the Department of Animal Science. Additionally, he remained active in many professional organizations including the National Swine Improvement Federation.

Ken and his wife Cheryl were married for over 30 years and have three children, Lauren, Sam and Will, and one grandchild. Ken and his family made their home in Huxley, Iowa. To all who knew him, Ken was a great friend and colleague, a big St Louis Cardinals fan, and a tremendous contributor and supporter to the swine industry and the field of animal breeding. He will be greatly missed by all who knew him. May his memory be a blessing.