



First Impressions

By Lori Ward Bocher

Before accepting the position as Dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALs), Roger Wyse had experienced very little exposure to the University of Wisconsin-Madison or the state itself.

"I'd been on campus once for a professional meeting. I'd had some professional contacts with the faculty as a result of my research programs," he recalled. But those contacts didn't form his first impression of the university.

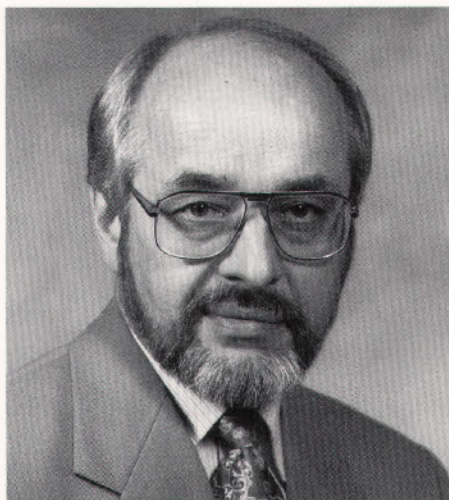
"My first impression, I guess, came when I was a student from an advisor who had gotten his degree here," Wyse continued. "He was always talking about the strengths and virtues of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. It has a long and proud history of excellence that is well known around the country. That really formed my first opinion."

Now that he's been Dean for one and one-half years, Wyse has had time to form some of his own impressions of the university, CALs, the state and the turfgrass industry.

"My first impressions from the outside were confirmed when I arrived," he said. "Wisconsin has the finest faculty of any public university in the country, particularly in the area of research. And I was pleased to note that the same research-oriented faculty is also very much interested in quality undergraduate education."

"One also has to be struck by the culture of individual faculty entrepreneurship and the fostering of that through the resources of the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation," he continued, adding that WARF is fairly unique to Wisconsin.

Wyse also was impressed by the "Wisconsin Idea," or the philosophy that the university is in service to the state. "Because of tight budgets, the university, in general, probably is not as responsive as it maybe had been in the past," he said. "But that is not based on lack of desire by the faculty, but simply by not having the flexible resources to put against those kinds of activities."



Dr. Roger Wyse

Wyse referred back to individual faculty entrepreneurship. "Faculty members are off getting their resources from various grants and contracts," he said. "That dictates the agenda of how they spend their time."

Wisconsin is in the top two or three among public universities in terms of research funded by outside grants. Wyse believes there needs to be a balance on how research is funded. "Here at Wisconsin, maybe the balance is skewed too much toward grants and contracts," he stated. "What we need is more flexibility in our state-funded research so that we can be more responsive to issues in the state."

That requires more money from the state. "Maybe not from the legislature alone, but from consortia or new sources of money," Wyse said. "You need to have flexibility so you can address those compelling issues and attract the best and brightest faculty to those areas."

The state's turfgrass industry is a good example of how this can be done. "I've been quite pleased to see that the industry has supported us with the Noer Center and with (faculty support)," Wyse said. "I think we're off to a great start and the future looks very bright."

"This kind of partnership is the kind of model I would like to see implemented throughout the College," he added. "Putting partnerships together between the faculty, the donors, the commodity groups so that we can adequately fund some of the important activities for which we don't have sufficient state resources."

Wyse appreciates the turfgrass industry for another reason. "I always enjoy working with the turf people because they're businessmen and they understand the need to make good, tough business decisions," he said. "They understand the importance of supporting research and outreach activities as an investment."

After attending two turf field days at the Noer Center, Wyse was impressed with the attendance. "And I saw a lot of enthusiasm for what was being done," he said. "I'm hoping that I'll have a chance this winter to meet with the representatives of the turf industry and talk about how we can strengthen the partnership that we have now."

Wyse came to Wisconsin from Rutgers University in New Jersey where the turf alumni were very strong supporters of the university. "The two industries are quite different," Wyse said, comparing New Jersey and Wisconsin. "There, turf and nursery is the Number 1 crop in the state. They have a very strong turf industry."

"And the turf program at Rutgers is a bit different in that they have one of the premier turfgrass breeders," he continued. "As a result of that, the university receives a royalty from the sale of seed. So that gives them a significant amount of resources to fund the turf program."

Surprisingly, Wyse found some similarities between the agricultural issues in New Jersey and Wisconsin. "The thing that struck me was that many of the same issues that we had to address in a highly urbanized state like New Jersey are exactly the same set of issues that we're concerned about in Wisconsin," he pointed out. "Environmental quality, urbanization, the impact of development on agriculture," he enumerated. "All of those are issues that you might think are limited to urban areas. But they're present throughout Wisconsin. Land use planning is going to be a key issue here."

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Wyse sees the agricultural economy in Wisconsin as strong, but challenged. "One of the things we need to do is to get a more positive attitude about the future of agriculture in the state, particularly in the dairy industry," he said.

CALS also has its strengths and challenges. Wyse sees strength in the diversity of having the basic biological sciences and environmental sciences in the same college as the agricultural sciences. "That diversity makes it a very strong unit, able to put teams together and look at issues from a broad perspective," Wyse said.

The challenge is found in two disappointments Wyse encountered when he came to CALS. "One was the budget deficit that the College faces," he explained. "The other is that the College has a tremendous backlog in renovation and deferred maintenance. We have a serious challenge in front of us with research laboratories, teaching laboratories and up-to-date classrooms.

"But CALS continues to be the flagship college of its type in the country," he added. "The research productivity continues to be outstanding."

Maybe, just maybe, the winning UW football team will make Wyse's job a little easier. "It builds enthusiasm among the alums," he said while explaining the trickle-down effect of the football team on CALS.

"We had an opportunity to bring in our alums for a couple of different occasions this fall," he pointed out. "One was the Football Fire-Up. We normally have 800 to 900 people attend. This year we had over 1,200.

"And we have a Dean's Breakfast for friends of the college," he continued, adding that the breakfast precedes a football game. "That normally brings in about 100 to 125 people. This year we had over 200."

Wyse was appointed Dean before Chancellor Donna Shalala was tapped for President Clinton's cabinet. "In part, my decision to come here was that I was quite impressed with Shalala and her ability to get things done," he said. "What I've just described indicates that CALS needs to get some things done.

"But I think that David Ward (current chancellor) has the same interest in the College and understands its needs," he continued. "I feel quite comfortable that his leadership will continue with Donna's commitment."

With his busy schedule, Dean Wyse doesn't have much time to enjoy the beauty of the Madison campus. "But if I have some free time in the summer I like to go up and sit on Observatory Drive and look out across the lake," he pointed out. "It's a very pleasant, quiet thing to do."

He's also appreciated the beauty in many parts of the state. "I've seen just about all of it," he said. "The past two summers I took a tour around the state, so I've been to almost all sections of the state. I've enjoyed a number of places and many different things. Everything from Lake Geneva up to Door County. Certainly the northern tier, in the wooded areas, is beautiful. And my wife and I enjoyed the Mississippi and the southwestern hills."

His wife, Jaleh Daie, is a professor with an active research program in the Department of Botany. She also is senior science advisor to the vice president of academic affairs for the University of Wisconsin System.

Wyse is a native of Wauseon, Ohio, a small town west of Toledo. He grew up on a farm and then attended Ohio State University where he received a B.S. in agronomy in 1966. He moved to Michigan State University for his graduate work and received an M.S. in crop science and a Ph.D. in plant physiology in 1969.

After college, Wyse's first job was with the U.S.D.A. Agricultural Re-

search Service in Logan, Utah where he was part of a research unit that was studying sugar beets. Later he moved to U.S.D.A. headquarters in Beltsville, Md., to take charge of the molecular biology laboratory there.

In 1986 he accepted his first academic post as a professor of soils and crops and senior associate director of the Agricultural Experiment Station at Rutgers University. When he left Rutgers to come to Wisconsin, he was dean of research at Cook College (the college of agriculture and natural resources at Rutgers) and director of the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station.

Dean Wyse's busy schedule hasn't allowed much time for outside activities—especially since taking on the new challenge as Dean of CALS. "I used to play golf and was hoping to get back into it this summer, but I was so busy that I just never got around to getting my clubs out and practicing," he said.

He also is an avid downhill skier who hasn't tried any of the ski hills in Wisconsin. "I'm pretty addicted to powder skiing in Utah," he explained.

"And I'm a potter," he added. "I've found a place now where I can get set up and I hope to get back into pottery. It's a chance to be creative, try new things, new techniques. Also, at the end of the day you can see what you've accomplished." ♣

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