
Walt Skroch was an accomplished weed science extension specialist at NC State who impacted weed management practices in horticultural crops in NC and beyond. A native of Arcadia, Wisconsin, Walt received his bachelor’s degree from the University of Wisconsin – River Falls and his M.S. and Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin – Madison. He joined the faculty at NCSU in 1964 and served there until his retirement in 1994. He was an early innovator in the concepts of integrated weed management systems. This work led to a new and radical (at the time) concept – that some “weedy” vegetation in the field can actually be beneficial to crop production. Asking his “signature” question: “What is a weed to a tree?” Walt demonstrated that the widely held belief that bare ground was best for maximum crop production was simply not true. In fact, he showed that some crops, like apple trees and Fraser fir, actually do better with living ground covers. In particular, Walt developed the widely-adopted living ground cover suppression program for southern Appalachian Fraser fir Christmas tree production that has saved millions of tons of soil from eroding, reduced vegetation management costs, reduced pesticide use and increased biodiversity. For this unique work, in 2015 he was inducted into the Western North Carolina Agriculture Hall of Fame.

His extension publications on weed management in nursery crops were widely adopted and still serve as a template for nursery crop and landscape weed management guides. A few of his other “greatest hits” include: the first (that we are aware of) computer decision aid for weed control recommendations (run on a Tandy computer); design and testing of soil fumigation equipment for strawberry producers; alternatives to methyl bromide for soil fumigation; collaborative research leading to the registration of many herbicides for horticultural crops, and contributed in development of the Southern Weed Science Society’s (SWSS) Weed ID manual. He served on the North Carolina Pesticide Technical Committee to help draft the N.C. Pesticide Law of 1972, which became a model for the nation. In addition, he developed the original state and national core manuals for pesticide applicator certification.

Walt Skroch advised 16 MS and Ph.D. students and innumerable Extension educators. He was a Fellow of the Weed Science Society of America, founding member and past-president of the Weed Science Society of North Carolina (WSSNC), and an active member of the SWSS. He received numerous awards including the Outstanding Extension Educator award from the American Society for Horticultural Science, Outstanding Extension Worker from NC State, the Porter Henegar Award from the Southern Nurserymen’s Association, and Distinguished Service award from the WSSNC.

A fulltime resident of Ashe County since 1997, Walt was an active contributing member of the Ashe community, including his Episcopal church and the Peak Creek Ruritan Club. Walt is survived by his wife, Carol Pendergraft Skroch; three daughters, Denise and husband Kirk of Apex, Joan and husband Darren of Raleigh, and Tammy and husband Robbie of Laurel Springs; two sons, Tim and wife Sharon of Garner, and Terry and wife Leigh of Garner. Walt is also survived by one brother, Mark, two sisters, Pat and Barb, as well as nine grandchildren and one great-grandchild. Walt was preceded in death by three brothers, Harold, Al and Don, and one sister, Virginia.
Dr. Walt Skroch induction into the Western North Carolina Agriculture Hall of Fame in 2015