

Who was Carl Carlson, State Entomologist of Iowa?

Carl E. Carlson was the State Entomologist at the Iowa Department of Agriculture, 1979 – 1992. Carlson succumbed to head injuries at age 53 following a car accident due to icy street conditions in November 1981.

Carlson received a graduate degree from Michigan State University and had been an Entomologist for USDA APHIS for 22 years. At USDA, Carlson was based in Michigan on the barberry eradication program, supervising the effort in several states. Carlson felt that his job at USDA was no longer necessary and then became State Entomologist for Iowa. Carlson was a strong believer in various levels of government working collaboratively to best serve citizens.



Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Dale Cochran said “he maybe best known for his tireless effort to prevent major infestations of the tree-killing gypsy [spongy] moth in Iowa. His election by his peers to serve as President of the National Plant Board in 1991 was a tribute to Carl’s commitment and professionalism.”

Bill McAdams, Regional Entomologist at the Iowa Department of Agriculture, worked with Carlson, said Carlson has a great demeanor, and could easily communicate with anyone whether it be elected officials or local citizens. “Carlson’s talent was being able to get people from opposite sides of an issue to find middle ground and reach an agreement. Carlson took pride in doing his job well. Working in regulatory can be difficult, some may come off as an enforcer, but Carl told me that whenever you’re dealing with an issue with someone, do your job but leave them their dignity. Carl was a good administrator, extremely well-liked by everyone he met, and he loved to talk to people.”

During Carlson’s time as State Entomologist, the HIS (Horticultural Inspection Society) Inspector’s Guide was proposed but not all states believed a guide was needed. Carlson spoke up at a contentious meeting in Ohio and was able to find consensus that a guide was needed to ensure uniformity among individual State inspection methods.

Carl was active in a variety of community efforts, from leading the Izaak Walton League’s efforts to save trout streams in northeast Iowa and oversaw the group’s Polk County Hunter Safety Program. As an avid outdoorsman, Carlson also was a member of the Iowa Sportsman Federation, National Rifle Association, Iowa Turkey Federation, the Arbor Day Foundation and Ankeny Masonic Lodge. At the time of his death Carlson was survived by his finance, four children, and seven grandchildren. He left an enduring legacy of good works and community service.