

# L. Neil Burcham

A caring professor, mentor, and encourager

**L. Neil Burcham** (b. 1941 Siloam Springs, Arkansas–d. 2022 Las Cruces, NM).

In five decades of teaching at New Mexico State University (NMSU), animal science professor Neil Burcham touched the lives of innumerable students. He also had a lasting impact on the livestock industry in New Mexico and across the USA. Born in Siloam Springs, Arkansas, he was an associate professor in NMSU's department of Animal and Range Sciences, in the College of Agricultural, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences (ACES), for 48 years before retiring in 2017.

Burcham received his bachelor's degree in Animal Husbandry from Oklahoma State, served in the US Army for two years, then earned his graduate degree from University of Arkansas. He came to NMSU in 1969, to teach Animal Science and Swine Production.

While Burcham was at NMSU, many said that he was the most influential professor they'd ever had.



Delaney and Burcham

As a friend, there was no better. No matter the problem – he always had your back.

As a professor... he taught us the value of working and studying hard. He also taught us the importance of honesty, integrity and being a good person. He taught us not only by his words, but by his actions.

—Dan Delaney (alumnus of the College of ACES)

After retiring, Burcham continued to impact the lives of many students. Cattle producers and students alike sought his opinion. He often shared the names of outstanding former students he knew were both hardworking and trustworthy. He also raised over \$270,000 for various uses on the college ranch.

Many described Burcham as a one-of-a-kind professor. Marcie Wallin, a former student and part of Burcham's livestock judging team, was one of many who stayed in touch with Burcham to ask for advice, or to simply catch him up on life milestones.

"Not only did Mr. Burcham help his students while in school, but after as well," Wallin said. "He tried to get me to accept a job offer after graduation, but I declined because I wanted to return home and live

happily ever after." Wallin says she went back to college 20 years later, earning a Bachelor of Science in Nursing. "I sent him an announcement, and in return, I received a note, written in pencil: 'Congratulations! I always knew you would make it. If you need any letters of recommendation, let me know! I keep his letter with my résumés to this day.'"

After retiring, Burcham continued to have an impact. "Cattle producers, feeders, and processors constantly sought his opinion," Chris Allison, NMSU Professor of Animal Science, said.

"Neil was never bashful about telling industry professionals about a student they should hire. He was undoubtedly the best job placement person on campus. He knew many in the livestock world, and he

made those connections daily, even after he retired," Dan Delaney said. Delaney, who graduated from NMSU in 1977, says he built his career on skills learned on Burcham's livestock judging team.

In October 2022, Burcham was inducted into the Northeastern Oklahoma Junior College Hall of Fame for the work he did with their livestock judging teams before moving to Las Cruces.

Delaney said Burcham will be greatly missed as a friend and mentor to many in the livestock world. His positive mark on those lives will always remain. "There now exists a huge void in the place he occupied in so many lives," he said. "If there was one person in my life that I wish I knew exactly what they thought of me, it is Neil. The best any can do is just to try and follow his lead."



Milton Thomas (Professor of Animal and Range Sciences at NMSU) and Burcham.



NMSU horse judging team after a contest in Fort Worth in 1989. Back row: Jeff Mobley, Herb Borden, Johnny Perea, L. Neil Burcham (coach). Front Row: Tracey Bays, Kenneth Lujan.



Burcham in a photo taken in 2021 for the Brahman Journal.