



Sam Houston State University

MEMBER THE TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

To: Rural Sociological Society Awards Committee

February 15, 2024

From: Douglas H. Constance
Professor of Sociology
Sam Houston State University

Re: Nomination of Dr. Curtis W. Stofferahn for the Distinguished Rural Sociologist Award

Dear RSS Awards Committee:

It is a pleasure and an honor for us to nominate Dr. Curtis W. Stofferahn for the prestigious Distinguished Rural Sociologist Award. Find included in this nomination packet: this letter of nomination, five letters of support (Cornelia Flora, Linda Lobao, Michael Schulman, Mary Hendrickson, and Michael Gertler, the link to Curt's webpage with multiple examples of supporting evidence (<http://ndrurallife.net/>) and his CV. In our view, Curtis Stofferahn is "Mr. Rural Sociology". The testimonials and evidence we provide in this nomination packet indicate overwhelmingly that Dr. Curtis Stofferahn is most deserving of this prestigious award from the Rural Sociological Society. For all of his career Curt has "walked the talk" of the engaged scholar, dedicating his life to bringing about positive social change for rural peoples in North Dakota in particular, and all rural peoples in general. He created the Land Grant model of balanced research, teaching and service at the University of North Dakota – a non-LGU university.

Curt's primary contribution to Rural Sociology engages the "Agrarian Question": "What is the relationship between quality of life for rural peoples and the structure of agriculture." Curt has fought long and hard to protect rural peoples and family farms from the encroachment of corporate agriculture. He has provided expert testimony in numerous court cases on this issue of corporate farming laws (see CV). That testimony eventually became a co-authored paper with Linda Lobao, "The Community Effects of Industrialized Farming: Social Science Research and Challenges to Corporate Farming Laws" (Lobao and Stofferahn 2008). That article is in the 99th percentile (ranked 999th) of the 160,136 tracked articles of a similar age in all journals and the 92nd percentile (ranked 1st) of the 13 tracked articles of a similar age in Agriculture and Human Values. SpringerLink shows 2190 accesses (<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10460-007-9107-8>) and Google Scholar shows 203 citations. This is a great example of how his public scholarship has crossed over into academic literature and how it is still being cited by opponents of industrialized agriculture. This is just one example of Curt's ability to take social science research from the university to the public service domain.

Over his career, Curt headed up the North Dakota Rural Life Poll (see CV and website). One of Curt's most fun research projects was one that he undertook with several of his rural community classes in which they studied the recovery of Northwood ND from an F4 Tornado. That rural town is only 30 miles from Grand Forks and the University, so it provided a natural laboratory to conduct a community case

Sam Houston State University is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Institution

Huntsville, TX 77341-2446 • 936.294.1512 • Fax 936.294.3573

study. His students gathered qualitative data from federal, state and local agencies, the newspaper, historical documents, and online interviews. After gathering the data, they used the community capitals framework to analyze it. They presented the research to the city council and mayor, were interviewed in the newspaper, and were featured in a UND publication. Curt repackaged that research for publication in *Community Development*.

Curt is probably best known for his research on cooperatives. When North Dakota experienced a boom in new generation cooperatives in the early 1990s, he was involved as an observer in their formation and later in their conversion. The study of the conversion of the Dakota Pasta Growers Cooperative was initially funded by the USDA Rural Development and Cooperative Services. Tom Gray and Curt repacked that research for publication in diverse outlets, including *Centre for the Study of Cooperatives* and *Journal of Cooperative Studies*.

Curt continues to conduct research, write and present papers, and submit articles for publication. Even in retirement, he can't avoid community and professional service: He has enjoyed serving on the board of directors of the Dakota Resource Council, coordinating the Faith and Farming Coalition of the Eastern North Dakota Synod of the ELCA, serving on the RSS Development Committee (2017-2021) and RSS Ethics Committee (2020-2022), and organizing with young millennials in Fargo about the climate emergency. Retirement also has provided Curt with time to conduct more concerted genealogical and family history research, as well as to sing more often with church choirs, the Master Chorale, and the FM Opera Chorus.

We cannot overstate how impressed we are with Curt's CV and his lifelong dedication to rural peoples, his state, his students, and RSS. Indeed, Dr. Curtis W. Stofferahn is "Mr. Rural Sociology" and we hope that the Rural Sociological Society honors him with the prestigious Distinguished Rural Sociologist Award.

Sincerely, (for the nomination contributors)

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Douglas H. Constance". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'D' and 'C'.

Douglas H. Constance
Cornelia Flora
Linda Lobao
Michael Schulman
Mary Hendrickson
Michael Gertler

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Department of Sociology
107 East Hall Ames,
Iowa 50011-1070
515-294-6480

January 6, 2024
Awards Committee
Rural Sociological Society

Dear Colleagues:

I am writing to support the nomination of Dr. Curtis Stofferahn for the Rural Sociological Society's Distinguished Rural Sociologist Award. I have known Curt for many years through RSS and later as part of the research and public service teams at the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development. I particularly admire his work because it combines research, public policy and outreach addressing key place-based issues in North Dakota, with implications for the rest of the U.S. and the world. Although he is now Emeritus, he continues his action research for rural America.

His work on some of the key cooperatives in North Dakota and his work with centers for scholarship on cooperatives has been particularly impressive. His generous work with state agencies both informed his work and informed the agencies. His concern for progressive, inclusive change is mirrored in his research, outreach activities, and his students. His participation in faculty governance and North Dakota groups for sustainable and just economies, communities, and agriculture is both generous and effective and continues in his "retirement".

He steadily published his research in journals where it would be read by those who could use it to work for social change. His understanding of the intertwining of economic, social, and ecological systems led him to ask hard questions about the dominant models of Great Plains agriculture and the institutions that support it. He constantly collaborated with scientists, advocates, and local leaders in his work.,

I particularly appreciate his effective use of the Community Capitals Framework in his action research around disaster recovery. He addresses cooperatives, labor, agriculture, the economy, and community – all of vital importance to the people of North Dakota – and people everywhere.

He sought and received funding for projects he knew could make a difference for North Dakota – and beyond. The list of his funding shows his link to initiatives for positive social change. He continues to be an involved member of organizations – professional and religious – that work for social justice. He continues to publish articles of sound science and important applied applications

in scholarly and activist journals. His service to rural America continues despite his emeritus status.

Dr. Stofferahn deserves the Distinguished Rural Sociologist Award because he embodies high standards of research addressing healthy ecosystems, economic security for all, and social inclusion. He asks hard questions of rural institutions and places at a time of great macro-structural change. And he used the answers in his analyses to provide a pathway for social, economic, and ecological improvement for rural people and places.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cornelia Flora". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Cornelia Butler Flora

Charles F. Curtiss Distinguished Professor Emerita of Sociology & Agriculture and Life Sciences
Research Professor, Kansas State University

1/10/2024

To: RSS Awards Committee

From: Michael D. Schulman



Subj: Support Letter for Dr. Curtis W. Stofferahn: Distinguished Rural Sociologist

I wholeheartedly support the nomination of Dr. Curtis W. Stofferahn for the RSS Distinguished Rural Sociologist Award. Dr. Stofferahn has a distinguished career as a teacher, researcher, administrator, and engagement with the public sociologist. At the University of North Dakota, he rose through the ranks from Assistant Professor to Professor and Chair. He has taught core undergraduate and graduate classes in applied sociology, community, and rural sociology. As evidenced by his research publications and his extensive record of presentations at professional meetings, his work is anchored in providing an understanding of social change in the Great Plains for both professional and general public audiences. The combination of professional publications, applied analyses (e.g., Rural Life Poll Publications), and publications in community outlets is exceptional. His recent work on community capitals and on the problems encountered by farmer cooperatives are exemplars of rural sociological theory and methods.

He has been an active member and contributor to the Rural Sociological Society and to the Great Plains Sociological Association throughout his career. During the year I was President of RSS, Dr. Stofferahn was the Secretary of RSS. I very much appreciated his professionalism and his contributions to the RSS Council as we dealt with a variety of issues, including a decision to cancel a contract with a hotel chain that was under scrutiny because of its labor policies.

In short, Dr. Stofferahn has distinguished himself as a teacher, scholar, and engaged rural sociological professional. He exemplifies the best traditions of rural sociology, especially the integration of basic and applied research and the application of rural sociological theory and methods to address the problems experienced by farm and rural populations. It is appropriate, that the RSS recognize his contributions to the welfare of farm and rural peoples and his career achievements with the Distinguished Rural Sociologist Award.



January 31, 2024

Awards Committee
Rural Sociological Society

Dear Members of the Awards Committee:

I am pleased to write in support for Dr. Curt Stofferahn for the Distinguished Rural Sociologist Award. Dr. Stofferahn has made outstanding contributions to rural sociology and to the well-being of rural people for over 30 years.

I view Curt as one of the unsung heroes of rural sociology through his research, policy efforts, and general community development efforts. I explain why this is the case below.

First, my most direct experience with Dr. Stofferahn's contributions comes from his efforts to protect rural communities from the onslaught of large-scale industrialized farms. In the early 2000s, I had been serving as an expert witness for the state of South Dakota to defend its then newly enacted anti-corporate farm law which aimed to restrict the absentee ownership of large-scale farms. Rural people of the state were particularly concerned that large, out of state hog farms were aiming to establish a presence and eventual chock-hold over local pork producers, family farms, and rural communities in general. My expert witness testimony was based on summarizing the decades of rural sociological research that had been conducted on the impacts of large-scale farms on communities, as in the Goldschmidt hypothesis. Working independently on a similar issue in the state of North Dakota (the protection of the state's anti-corporate farm laws) for the ND Attorney General's Office, Curt contacted me and we began to collaborate in research and policy-related work. We produced an article from our work ("The community effects of industrialized farming: Social science research and challenges to corporate farming laws" *Agriculture and Human Values* 2008). Curt continued his work over the years, providing his state with extensive service as an expert witness in many legal cases aimed at defending family farming and rural communities from corporate intrusion (e.g., *North Dakota v. Crosslands*, 2006; *Cook Waterfowl v. North Dakota*, 2012; *Stenehjem v. National Audubon Society, Inc.* 2014; *North Dakota Farm Bureau v. Stenehjem*, 2018; *North Dakota v. Access Pipeline* 2019).

Second, in addition to the research and policy efforts above, Dr. Stofferahn has been an early innovator in rural sociology in terms of survey research. He was one of the first to develop (in 1988) and utilize in rural life polls as a strategic way to call attention to rural issues, and influence policy and research. Many states over the years have adopted these polls with Dr.



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Stofferahn one of the first to iron out this methodology. He continued to lead the implementation of these polls in his state for almost two decades.

Third, Dr. Stofferahn has provided extensive service to the Rural Sociological Society (RSS). He received the "Special Recognition Award for Outstanding Service to RSS" in 2014." He was Secretary of RSS from 2010-2013. In addition, he was elected to the RSS Council for 2007-2008, and served as chair/chair-elect of the Professional Communications Committee from 2007-2009. He was also co-chair of the Rural Sociological Society 75th Anniversary Committee. Most recently, Dr. Stofferahn has been a member of the RSS Ethics Committee (2020-2022) and the RSS Development Committee (2017-2021).

Finally, Dr. Stofferahn has made an important mark outside of RSS, both in academia and in community organizations. He served as Chair, Department of Sociology, University of North Dakota from 2013-2017 and was President of the Great Plains Sociological Association from 1997-1998. Throughout his career, Dr. Stofferahn has highly involved in numerous community organizations often taking leadership positions. For example, he has been the recent (2019-2023) Chair of the Board of Directors of the Dakota Resource Council and was a recent (2020) President of the North Dakota Rural Voters, a 501C4 Political Endorsement Group. He was also the founder of the North Dakota Progressive Coalition.

In sum, Dr. Stofferahn has made important contributions to rural life and to RSS and is most deserving of recognition from our society.

Sincerely,

Linda Lobao
Academy Professor, Rural Sociology
Distinguished Professor, College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences



College of
Agriculture
Food and
Natural
Resources

Division of Applied Social Sciences
College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources
University of Missouri-Columbia

322 Mumford Hall ♦ Columbia, MO 65211 ♦ Telephone: 573-882-7463

January 8, 2024

Dear RSS Awards Committee:

I wholeheartedly support Curt Stofferahn's nomination as Distinguished Rural Sociologist. Very few in the society have managed to embody the sociological imagination as Curt has done throughout his career, translating his scholarly knowledge into action for farmers and rural communities while using their ideas and concepts to further his scholarship and his teaching. Since first meeting Curt over two decades ago at RSS meetings, I have benefitted from his insights, including his quiet mentoring of new rural sociologists.

One of his biggest contributions to the rural sociological literature, his 2008 meta analysis of the Goldschmidt Hypothesis with Linda Lobao, remains an extremely important synthesis of the community impacts of the structural organization of food and agriculture. I relied on early drafts of this scholarship when participating in writing the International Assessment of Agriculture Science and Technology for Development, because it was the **best** summary of what has happened in North American agriculture in the late 20th century. It's important to note why I had this access – because the article grew out of research that he and Linda did to help the South Dakota attorney general defend the state's corporate farming law. This epitomizes the kind of applied scholarship that so many of us in the society aspire to – intellectually rigorous but extremely applicable to communities.

I also know that Curt is well regarded within the North Dakota Farmers' Union, because of his involvement in helping them understand the community and farm level impacts of changes in food and agriculture. For instance, in 2016, he helped the organization think through how they could best support the state's corporate farming which were being challenged in court. He was also instrumental in connecting them with academics who could contribute research and knowledge to the defense. After formal retirement, he has brought his scholarship to bear in service activities that directly impact rural communities, serving 4 years in the leadership of Dakota Rural Action, and facilitating a task force on faith and farming for the North Dakota Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

In addition, he brings this first-hand knowledge of farmers and their thinking to his scholarship. For instance, his cautionary articles on changes in farmer cooperatives in the last few decades reflect his on-the-ground knowledge of how they work. Even as a professor emeritus, Curt is still working as a scholar. He recently published analysis of conflict between a labor union and agricultural cooperative management, which long had been natural allies. I was especially impressed by his 2018 RSS presentation examining the framing that proponents and opponents used in the North Dakota referendum on corporate farming – those less familiar with the conditions might not have presented such a nuanced analysis. He has continued this analysis and has a manuscript forthcoming.

Every time I talk with Curt, I learn something. His dedication to scholarship and extending that through teaching and outreach is admirable. But it his action in the collective – in the Farmers' Union organization, Dakota Rural Action, in his faith community or in service to public officials – that inspires this applied scholar. Curt is truly deserving of the title "Distinguished Rural Sociologist."

Sincerely,

Dr. Mary Hendrickson
Associate Professor of Rural Sociology

RSS Awards and Endowment Committee
Distinguished Rural Sociologist Award
February 14, 2024

Dear Committee Members:

I write to support the nomination of Curtis Stofferahn for the RSS Distinguished Rural Sociologist Award. He is a most worthy candidate who reflects the highest standards that our organization upholds for such recognition. His accomplishments as a rural sociologist have been and will be an inspiration to our members and to others who learn of his work.

As a long-time member of the RSS and the Sociology of Agriculture and Food RIG, I have interacted with Curtis and become acquainted with his numerous scholarly contributions. I make a habit of reading what he publishes because I know that I am ensured a careful review of quality literature, a fresh take on a serious issue, and a readable analysis that provides a nuanced assessment and points to actions. For the same reasons, I have recommended his articles to my graduate students and adopted his work in my classes.

My letter comes from north of North Dakota (north of Montana to be exact). As a rural sociologist teaching at the University of Saskatchewan, and as a research fellow at its Canadian Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, I can testify especially about his contributions to the sociology of agriculture and rural development, and to studying rural co-operatives.

Curtis has acted on concerns for the integrity and future of co-operatives as social economy vehicles for positive change in rural places. He is the best kind of ally to the co-op movement and to other farmer-led organizations. He does not hesitate to gently and convincingly highlight principles neglected, opportunities missed, and possibilities dismissed. He has not been afraid to take on directors, managers, and financial advisors, and to critique economic orthodoxies convincing them that farmer-owned co-ops cannot succeed. The leading edge of this debate took place where farmer-owned "new generation co-ops" (themselves a contestable hybridization of corporate and cooperative logics) attempted to compete in value-adding activities where multinational corporations were accustomed to unchallenged preeminence. He collaborated repeatedly to use critical discourse analysis to reveal how the demutualization and sale of farmer-owned enterprises was being erroneously framed as logical and necessary.

Curt's concern with the wellbeing and coherence of co-operatives as democratic and equitable engines of rural development is also reflected in his willingness to don another hat, that of the sociologist of labor/work. He has investigated problematic relations between two great emancipatory movements—labor unions and co-ops. This has taken the form of studies of approaches to labor relations and case studies of strikes, among other diagnostic initiatives.

Another important throughline in Curt's research and writing is the future of farming in the context of agricultural restructuring. This was evident in his choice of dissertation topic and in subsequent studies of organic farming, machinery sharing, the community effects of industrialized farming, and struggles over anti-corporate farming laws. While this is already an impressive array of topics, his broader engagement with rural people, communities, and

economies was reflected in studies of growth fundamentalism in dying towns, the livelihood strategies of the rural unemployed, enhancing local and regional food systems, the locality effects of new generation co-ops, and support for oil industry regulation. He has used his research and writing to engage with a smorgasbord of salient rural issues and has not shrunk from challenging conventional thinking.

The scope of his learning and interests is also displayed in the range of undergraduate and graduate courses he has taught at the University of North Dakota, at North Dakota State University, and in Norway. He has manifested the breadth and depth of a seasoned rural sociologist when teaching courses or leading advanced seminars in Social Change, Social Problems, Sociological Theory, Research Methods, Research Design, Applied Sociology, Rural Sociology, Environmental Sociology, Community Sociology, Political Sociology, Rural Development, and the Sociology of the Great Plains.

Curt has generously contributed his energies as a mentor and networker, cultivating collaborations with researchers in various universities, agencies, civil society organizations, and professional associations. He has supported the exchange of ideas and cooperative inquiry. The list of his co-authors includes many stalwarts of rural sociology. He has extended himself to build working relationships with colleagues across the USA as well as in Scandinavia and Canada. He has presented at academic conferences far and wide, including more than 40 papers given at RSS annual meetings. Amazingly, he has also found the time to meaningfully support university governance and the rights of academic faculty, along with many programs and centers—not infrequently as a founder or central mover.

Curt is a broad-gauged scholar who brings hard-won wisdom to whatever projects he takes on. His contributions have been steady over more than four decades, and they continue. He is a committed public intellectual, one who supports professional and rural organizations with his time, skills, and analysis. He has documented, critiqued, and assessed the impacts of neo-liberalization while working with students, colleagues, and community allies in the context of a state committed to petroleum, agribusiness, and mainstream rural development. His record demonstrates that he believes in sociology as a social endeavor to be rigorously pursued on many fronts. He remains an engaged citizen and scholar with commitments and contributions that span salient societal issues, academic subfields, economic subsectors, institutional venues, and geographic locations. He has helped in important ways to make rural sociology shine as a discipline and to make the Rural Sociological Society thrive as a relevant, polyvalent, diverse, and welcoming organization. He should be recognized and celebrated.

Sincerely,



Michael E. Gertler
Associate Professor, Department of Sociology
Associate Member, School of Environment and Sustainability
Fellow, Canadian Centre for the Study of Co-operatives