In Memoriam—Lou N. Langan
A Loss to Nevada Soil Survey

W. E. Dollarhide

In late March, I received word Lou Langan had died. I believe Lou left Nevada in late 1968 when he went to the Soils Staff at the National Technical Center in Portland, OR, making it unlikely any of the current soil scientists in Nevada had the opportunity to work with Lou in the field, but several scientists had the opportunity to be in training sessions with Lou.

I believe Lou was a cornerstone in the development of Soil Survey in Nevada. He served as State Correlator from the mid 1950s to 1968, during the development of the 7th Approximation and the New Classification System. If you did not know Lou, I ask that you pick up any of the surveys from Nevada published during the 1960s or 1970s, and you will see the impact Lou had on soil survey in the state.

If you will bear with me, I'll share a couple of stories that molded my perception of Lou Langan.

In 1968, when I was a soil scientist in California, I got the opportunity to go on a detail to the Lake Tahoe Basin, a survey that covered parts of California and Nevada. Early in the process, a coordination meeting was held with Dick Huff (Soil Correlator from California), Grant Kennedy (California Area Soil Specialist), Lou Langan (Soil Correlator for Nevada), and the crew. When I was introduced to Lou, there was a familiarity, but I could not place where I had seen him before. Sometime about mid-week it occurred to me he had been a referee at one of my high school basketball games and made what I believed to be a terrible call. He had quickly run over and stood right in front of me, almost daring me to comment. That evening after several drinks I ask Lou if he had been a referee, and he confirmed he was. So I told him he had made a bad (substituted word) call, he grinned and said, "I almost got you for a technical too." My first test.

In 1969 when I came to Nevada as a project leader, the field work had been finished and Eddie Spencer was the new correlator. Lou came down from Portland to give Eddie and me a quick whirlwind tour of the soils and concepts in the survey. At one of the stops, Lou and I got into an extended debate about the classification of one of the pedons and the practicability of that classification. Later I said something to Eddie about it and he said, "Oh, he knew you were right, he just wanted to find out how much you knew, and how far you would defend it." Second test.

A couple of years later, I went to Portland for a soil mechanics class that Lou was teaching. I felt like I had a "Pick on Me" sign on my forehead. When I did not know the answer, it was pointed out how critical that information was. When I did know the answer, Lou pointed out all the other possible concerns. Once again, he had made me to learn more than I had intended.

So when you are describing a soil out on a landscape and the classification fits and it seems to fit ecologically, tip your cap and give a little thanks to Lou. If you were at a training session and got picked on and learned a little more about soil behavior or filling out a Soils 5 form; tip your cap and give a special thanks to Lou.

He will be missed.

Irrigated cropland under alfalfa near Lovelock, NV. The soils in Lovelock Area were mapped in the mid to late 1950s by Lou Langan and others.

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