

Long time advisor Eric Natwick retires after 36 years of service

BY TRISH BURICH-MCNEECE
Special to this Newspaper

After a long and distinguished career with the University of California Cooperative Extension office in Imperial County, entomologist Eric Natwick has decided to hang up his bug net.

Natwick graduated from the University of Wyoming in 1980 and began work with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) in their insect lab in Tucson, Ariz. On July 1, 1981 he moved to the Imperial Valley where he joined the UCCE-Imperial County office as the entomology advisor.

Since then he has been a critical resource for pest management needs in field crops, alfalfa and vegetables. Besides alfalfa, his main focus has been on cotton, cole crops, lettuce, melons, onions and bell peppers.

His most recent work has been working to spot and send out important information to growers and pest control advisers (PCAs) on the potentially devastating sugarcane aphid. Some of his other important projects include whitefly host plant resistance in cotton, insecticidal control of cotton pests and whitefly control in melons, and the tomato yellow leaf curly virus, a disease that threatens both tomato production fields as well as home gardens.

Back in the 1990s, Natwick's work and research on the pink bollworm which was invading the region's cotton fields, was instrumental in changing growers' practices by restricting cotton planting and terminating dates.

The pink bollworm is no longer as severe a pest as it once was.

He has also put in an enormous amount of work into combating the sweet potato whitefly for which he has been recognized locally, statewide and nationally.

He worked on pesticide evaluations for short term control of the pest and tested alfalfa varieties for whitefly resistance. Natwick also helped develop an alfalfa irrigation management



Eric Natwick, retire from UCCE-Imperial County after 36 years of service. COURTESY PHOTO

strategy to reduce whitefly numbers.

During his time at UCCE-Imperial County, Natwick's expertise in entomology was sought out all over the world. He has given presentations and provided consulting to more than 25 countries, including Australia, Saudi Arabia, Mexico and most recently Spain. In 1994, he received a distinguished service award as outstanding research advisor.

Former county director, Khaled Bali said, "Eric has always been a hard worker and is one of the top one percent of advisors in having achieved the highest step (Step 9) in the UC system six years ago."

Another former colleague, Michael Rethwisch of the University of Nebraska, Lincoln said, "It takes a special person to be a successful low desert cooperative extension entomology advisor. It takes grit, perseverance, self-motivation, leadership and an expert eye for new insect pests and resulting challenges when diseases are involved. Eric, you not only survived, but thrived."

Current county Director Oli Bachie said, "Because of his great knowledge, Eric has been our 'go-to' person for our new advisors when they had questions or needed ideas. I can say that Eric has been a great artist of research in the field of entomology whose position will not easily be filled."

In addition to his research, Natwick also served two terms on the Holtville City Council and was mayor in 1988-1989. He was also Cooperative Extension's county director for five years.

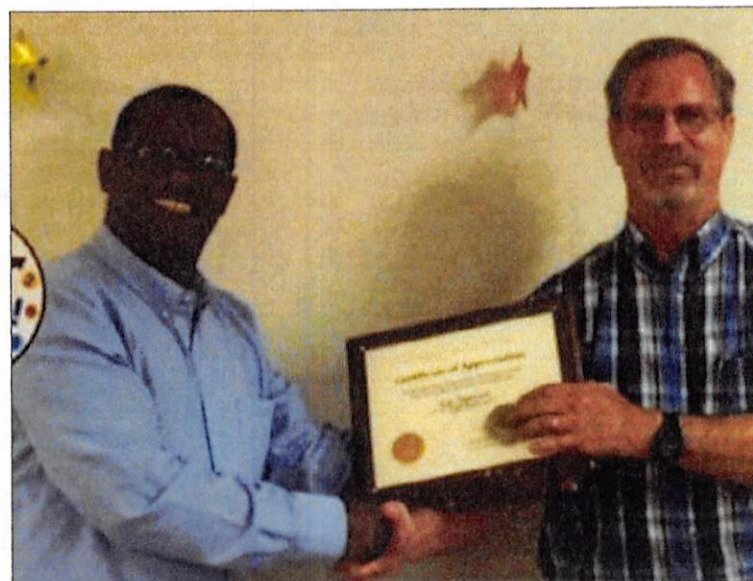
He has also done extensive



Some people in attendance at Natwick's retirement party. COURTESY PHOTOS



Ag commissioner Carlos Ortiz presenting Eric with a plaques on behalf of the Imperial County board of Supervisors.



County director, Oli Bachie presenting Eric with a plaque from the University of California, Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

mission work internationally.

Natwick was recently recognized at a retirement party in his honor. About 70 of his colleagues, friends and employees

turned out to say thanks for his years of service. He and his wife Lisa recently moved to Cedar City, Utah, where they plan to enjoy their "golden years."