Warren F. Brannon was born and grew up in America’s breadbasket where, on the family farm in North Loop, Nebraska, he gained practical experience raising a herd of Polled Herefords and feeding pigs. He also took responsibility for the care of the ewe flock at lambing time. After graduation from high school, he attended Kearny State Teachers College, but left to join the Army one year later, after the attack on Pearl Harbor. He spent his three-year duty primarily in the far western Aleutian Islands and India. Thereafter, he re-entered college at the University of Nebraska, receiving his B.S. degree in 1950. Warren then came to Cornell University as a graduate assistant where he specialized in beef cattle nutrition, earning his M.S. degree in 1951. Continuing his studies at Cornell, this time in the field of Animal Breeding and Genetics, he received the Ph.D. degree in 1953 and accepted a temporary assignment as acting assistant professor of livestock extension at Cornell. In 1954 he became an animal husbandman at the USDA Range Experiment Station at Burns, Oregon, where he conducted research on the genetics of rate and quality of weight gain as well as vitamin and trace mineral nutrition in range cattle.
Warren began his duties as an assistant professor of Animal Husbandry (now Animal Science) in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell University in 1956. His responsibilities were divided between adult and youth (4-H) extension. The adult effort was focused primarily on the sheep industry. One of his accomplishments involved the development of regional wool marketing cooperatives, which by 1979 handled about 60% of all wool produced in New York State. These “wool pools” served as a basis for coordinating the collection, sorting, grading and marketing of wool from the small individual flocks which typified the New York sheep industry. Warren conducted wool grading schools for growers as well as for the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets. He also conducted annual shearing schools at several locations to accommodate growers who needed training. The production of market lambs that would better meet some of the niche market opportunities offered by New York City was also a continuing educational theme as he worked with producers, often through their cooperatives, to modify standards and increase efficiency. Warren practiced what he preached in his own personal research laboratory, a 200-acre sheep farm near Ithaca. His Dorset flock set a standard of excellence for other producers and demonstrated how to achieve three rather than two lamb crops every two years. He fostered the use of new practical approaches to housing and feeding market lambs, such as self-feeding complete feeds (mixtures of forage and grain) to growing lambs. He also introduced artificial insemination to the sheep industry as a method of hastening genetic improvement.

Professor Brannon devoted a large share of his time to youth projects involving livestock production and meat science. He worked extensively with county 4-H clubs, initiating and developing new ideas involving swine, sheep and beef cattle. He was interested not only in training young people how to identify, measure and manage important quantitative growth traits in their meat-producing animals, but in encouraging them to also think in terms of important end-product or carcass traits. It was important that they appreciate the fact that the most desirable carcass does not always come from the best-performing animal or even the one judged as a live animal.
to have the best conformation. Among other methods of demonstrating this, certain classes at the State Fair were designated for slaughter after having been placed as live animals, so that the carcasses could then be evaluated and ranked. Many contestants soon learned first-hand that the correlation was far from perfect.

As products of his extension program, Dr. Brannon wrote and published over 100 news articles on beef, sheep and swine production. He also prepared a large number of radio talk shows for use through New York State Extension media. During the last third of his career at Cornell, he published his extension bulletins and reports in the form of a monthly information letter, The Shepherds’ Voice. This newsletter was mailed to all New York county extension offices and to personnel in the sheep industry throughout New England, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia and West Virginia.

Warren was a member of Phi Kappa Phi, Sigma Xi and the American Society of Animal Science. He was promoted to associate professor in 1962. He used sabbatical leaves at the University of Wisconsin (1962) and the University of West Virginia (1969) to good advantage in generating and exploring new ideas and updating materials for his program in parasitology, consumerism and youth development. He retired in 1979 and was granted emeritus status. After retirement he served on the NYS Beef Council and NYS Association of Meat Processors until 2011.

As an avocation, Warren served for some 20 years as a Dryden, NY school board member, overseeing the explosive growth of that system in the 1960s and 1970s. He also enjoyed playing trombone and singing in gospel quartets. Church worship, fellowship and administration as a faithful servant within the Seventh Day Baptist denomination were very important to him.

Warren and his wife, Marion, who were wed soon after his return from Army service, have four children (Nancy, Larry, Dennis and Kenneth), 13 grandchildren and 23 great grandchildren. Warren and Marion had been married for 65 years before her death in 2011.

W.R. Butler, Chair; M.L. Thonney; J.M. Elliot