PREFACE

by Matthew T. Holt and Jean-Paul Chavas

This book is presented as a tribute to Stanley R. Johnson, a true giant in the field of agricultural economics. It is a collection of articles written by former students and colleagues who, at various points in time, have had the privilege to study or work with him over the last thirty years. The book has three objectives. First, to provide a reflection on the many contributions to economics, econometrics, and economic policy Stan has made throughout his long and productive career. The scope of these contributions is truly nothing short of amazing (see Stan’s CV in the Appendix). With strong foundations in economic theory, his work has covered vast ground, ranging from econometric theory, econometric modeling, economic theory, applied policy analysis, and economic advising to policymakers. Indeed, the sheer breadth of his career created a tremendous challenge for us as editors in deciding what to include and exclude. We finally decided to focus on the following division, which would best help to understand his contribution: policy analysis and institution design (Part I) and methodology, econometrics, and applied economics (Part II). The first part focuses on Stan’s role as a policy analyst and economic advisor. His broad views and deep insights into economic incentives and institutional design have proved extremely useful in understanding and managing policy and institutional change in the United States, the former Soviet Union, and elsewhere. The chapters in this part provide scholarly reflections on these issues related to economic analysis and policy reform. The second part focuses on Stan’s contributions to academic knowledge, with special attention given to econometrics and applied economics. Many of the chapters are written by former students who learned the art and challenges of conducting advanced empirical research from Stan.

Besides being a great scholar, Stan has distinguished himself as an outstanding communicator and mentor. For his former students, he provided extraordinary support and guidance that is hard to match. He truly excels in his ability to identify interesting economic issues, to use economic theory as a guide in economic modeling, to formulate problems in a way that is empirically tractable, to make use of or otherwise refine advanced econometric tools, and to interpret econometric results in ways that provide new and useful insights on relevant economic issues. We can both testify that his sense of excitement in conducting advanced research was contagious. His outstanding communication skills and his ability to create a positive and supportive environment for his students and coworkers made it a pleasure to work with him. For most of us, Stan provided a clear road-map for what we economists can do to develop and refine our research tools, to improve our understanding of economic behavior, and to find workable solutions to relevant economic issues in the agricultural economy and elsewhere. His expertise and enthusiasm have inspired many of his
former students to strive for excellence while exploring the frontiers of economic knowledge. As such, Stan’s mentoring skills have generated huge dividends.

This leads to the second objective of this book, which is simply to say “thank you” to Stan for the large and positive impact he has had on the academic community and, indeed, the world. Although the authors of this book represent only a small subset of the many people who benefited from association with him, their own sense of gratitude is profound: simply put, Stan Johnson has helped make the world a better place.

Finally, we want to thank the many people who helped to make this book project become a reality. They include Liesl Koch, who provided expert editorial assistance in the preparation of the book, and Eli Windchy at BEPress. We also thank the Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute at the University of Missouri-Columbia, the Center for Agricultural and Rural Development at Iowa State University, and the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics at North Carolina State University for providing financial gifts that ultimately made publication of this book possible.

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