As a scientist in Agronomy who helped change the farming practices in Eastern Colorado through his research and outreach, Dr. Dwayne Westfall was the embodiment of Colorado State University’s land grant tradition.

Born on November 21, 1938, Westfall grew up on a farm in Idaho, with a cattle feeding operation, crops, and, of course, potatoes. Initially, he thought he’d stay on the farm, but his father sat him down and said, “Dwayne, there’s a lot easier ways to make a living in agriculture than farming.” On advice from his high school principal, he took chemistry and math in preparation for college instead of the course he wanted to take, auto-mechanics. This early guidance and support led him to pursue a Bachelor’s degree in Agronomy at the University of Idaho.

During his undergraduate years, Westfall was a member of Farmhouse fraternity and the Ag Club. By his junior year, he knew he was going to graduate school. He was also in ROTC, so after he graduated in 1961, he became a Second Lieutenant in the Chemical Corp of the Army during the Cold War. Stationed in Maryland for two years, he conducted research related to biological warfare on crops, which fortunately the Army never used.

Westfall worked under a plant pathologist in the Army who was on sabbatical from Washington State University. In 1963, after his stint in the Army was over, the pathologist got him a job at the university as a Research Fellow. The pathologist also arranged for him to enroll at WSU for a four-year fellowship, which, “if you passed muster,” led straight to a PhD. “I had to work hard,” Westfall admits. “I wasn’t an intellect.” But he passed muster and finished his dissertation in 1967, on the Chemistry of Aluminum in Highly Acidic Soils.

After earning his PhD from WSU, Westfall went to work at a Texas A&M Research and Extension Center in Beaumont, TX, experimenting with rice. He spent six years wading through rice paddies before deciding to return to the West. For 5 years, he worked at the Great Western Sugar Company in Longmont, where, among other things, he supervised grants that the company gave to universities, which led to a job at Colorado State University.

In 1978, Westfall was hired by CSU to work on the USDA Funded On-Farm Water Management project in Lahore, Pakistan, spending two years abroad. This project sparked a love for international travel and work, and over his career, he also conducted projects in South Africa, Morocco, India, Pakistan, Chile, and Australia, on top of working extensively with international students. After two years as a state soil fertility specialist, he took over a research/teaching assignment and discovered a love of teaching, especially in order to “influence young people the way I had been influenced by professors … influence them to be better citizens and scientists.” During his productive career at CSU, he published 125 refereed journal articles, around 250 other types of publications, and wrote several book chapters.

Besides teaching, Westfall’s major accomplishment at CSU was garnered through a partnership with Dr. Gary Peterson. The two undertook a large dryland research projects such a cropping systems management and the effect of nitrogen and phosphorus fertilization on dry land wheat farming. At the beginning of their project, “10% of farmers used nitrogen and phosphorus fertilizers but through extension programs we showed farmers the importance of proper fertility management,” so that by the end of the project, 90% used proper fertilization. “We had a significant impact on farming in Eastern Colorado,” he says proudly. Environmental concerns also encouraged Westfall to help change the farming systems, based on “a philosophy
that we need to optimize yield with environmental protection as one of the main factors of our decision” instead of merely recommending fertilizer for maximum yield.

Outside of the university, Westfall was active in the American Society of Agronomy and Soil Science Society, being elected as a Fellow of each society. In 2010 he was given the “Distinguished Career Award” by the College of Agricultural Sciences. He owns an agronomic and soil science consulting company, and has served as an expert witness in litigations related to agricultural production. He earned many awards from regional, national and international organizations in recognition of his achievements in research. He credits much of his own growth to his students, learning how to communicate with farmers and teach things that fit into their practices. Ultimately, he says new faculty members shouldn’t “lose focus on the students you’re impacting … because those are the people who are going to be the future leaders of agriculture in the US”, especially if CSU’s land grant tradition is going to continue to have “such a positive impact on agriculture in the US and the world.”