

CHANGING DIRECTIONS

By Susan Thompson

WELL-KNOWN ECONOMIST SEES IOWA AG THROUGH CRISIS TO NEW OPPORTUNITIES

In his 32 years at Iowa State, Robert Jolly had several job titles and a wide array of duties. “One of the things I always appreciated was being able to change direction without leaving town,” he jokes.

Jolly’s most recent direction at Iowa State was leading the Agricultural Entrepreneurship Initiative.

“Dean Woteki asked me and Steve Nissan to put some wheels under the initiative,” Jolly says. “We started with a multi-pronged approach, working with faculty and students, developing educational materials and building entrepreneurship into the curriculum and activities.”

That was in 2005. It wasn’t long before Jolly realized he was in familiar territory.

“People sometimes think it’s puzzling professors get involved in entrepreneurship. But if you look at what we do, we look for opportunities, find money, develop programs and fill needs. Those are entrepreneurial activities,” he says.

Jolly was hired by Iowa State in 1979 as an extension economist, but soon added research and teaching to his responsibilities. In 1985, an administrative position came his way.

“Dean Kolmer asked me to move into an assistant dean position. At the time, I

was very involved in developing programs to help farmers, lenders and communities survive the farm crisis. I agreed to a part-time position to look at strategic issues the Experiment Station was facing, since state funding for agricultural research had languished.”

There was a strong sense Iowa didn’t want to go through another farm crisis, and Jolly saw that as a good opportunity to increase funding for agricultural research.

He and others developed a legislative proposal to double the state’s appropriation for agricultural research, and garnered enough political support that the proposal was approved. For Jolly that success was a “career highlight.”

International work was another important part of Jolly’s Iowa State career. As Eastern Europe began to collapse, he worked on projects in the former Soviet Union, followed by more recent efforts in China and India.

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Now international activities occupy some of Jolly’s retirement days. He works part-time for an Irish dairy and beef nutrition company he describes as “a second generation entrepreneurial business, using wonderfully innovative technology.”

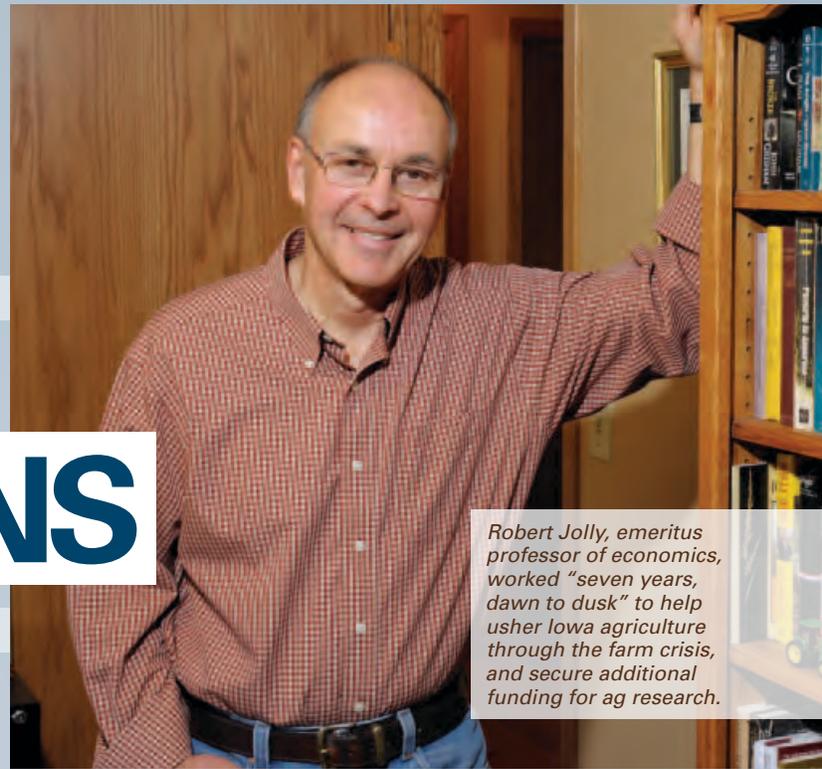
He also is involved with a startup non-governmental organization based in Chicago that provides financing and technical assistance to firms in dairy supply chains.

“The idea is to help farmers in developing countries grow their farm businesses and cooperatives while providing an acceptable

rate of return for investors,” he says.

These international efforts follow the same pattern Jolly exhibited during his time at Iowa State.

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Robert Jolly, emeritus professor of economics, worked “seven years, dawn to dusk” to help usher Iowa agriculture through the farm crisis, and secure additional funding for ag research.

Photo: Bob Elbert