

## Evenson's law



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Robert E. Evenson, longtime friend of economics in the Philippines, passed away on 2 February 2013. Bob lived a full life. After becoming an award-winning farmer, he went back to school and became an award-winning academic and was selected as a Fellow of the American Agricultural Economics Association. His teaching and research at the Universities of Minnesota, the Philippines, and at Yale were always informed by his experience and knowledge about how the world actually worked. Many of us benefited from his endless supply of stories about people and things.

I first met him in Los Baños, Laguna, in 1974. He had just started serving as the Philippines Associate for the Agricultural Development Council and as visiting professor at the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) and the School of Economics at UP Diliman. He was a lifetime member of

the Philippine Economic Society. He soon became my inspiration and role model, a function he served for many.

Professor Evenson was the premier champion of economics in agricultural research. He published so many studies and meta-studies documenting high rates of return that we started calling his 40 percent rule of thumb “Evenson’s Law”. He drove two additional nails into the coffin of neo-Marxian pessimism concerning the Green Revolution. First, he empirically showed that while the high-yielding varieties (HYVs) of rice and wheat were indeed (mildly) labor-saving, the positive effects on yield per hectare per year led to a substantial increase in labor productivity. He also explained how HYVs further increased labor productivity through positive “Boserup effects” via the evolution of increasingly specialized agricultural contracts.

As visiting professor at UP, Bob organized a major research project on the New Household Economics, culminating in a symposium issue of the *Philippine Economic Journal* in 1978. This was the inspiration for our subsequent Philippine project on the New Institutional Economics. Together the two projects spawned several UP theses and dissertations.

A dedicated empiricist, Bob found statistical needles in haystacks of noisy data. In “Markets, institutions and family size in Philippine rural households”, he documented a significant effect of transaction costs on rural fertility, which included the first empirical measurement of transaction costs, garnered from his long-running Laguna household survey. He loved regressions. I remember sitting in his office on several occasions discussing ideas, when his research assistant would come in with the latest printout. Bob could not keep his eyes off it. It was like a mystery novel that you cannot put down. He just had to see how the results came out.

Bob’s wisdom and warmth attracted countless visitors to seek his counsel, much like pilgrims to a guru. Bob was extremely generous, sharing his time, table, and home without reservation. We have lost a dear friend, but his spirit of using sound economics in the service of low-income farmers lives on.