

In memoriam: Jessica Davis

February 12, 2026

Jessica Davis

Jessica Gwyn Davis, former president of ASA and Fellow of both ASA and SSSA, passed away on Jan. 26, 2026 in Fort Collins, CO at the age of 63. She was born to Daniel and Goentje Davis in Charlotte, MI on May 20, 1962. She graduated from Abington High School in Pennsylvania (1980), Cornell University (1983, B.S. Agronomy), Texas Tech University (1984, M.S. Soil Science), Texas A&M University (1989, Ph.D. Soil Science), and Boston University (2012, Graduate Certificate in Entrepreneurship). She married Jack Rainey in 1986, who passed away in 1987.

Davis was on the faculty of the University of Georgia from 1989–1995 and moved to Colorado State University (CSU) in 1995. She married LaVern “Swanie” Swanson in 1997 and has two amazing children, Maya Swanson and Peter Swanson. While in hospice, she told her siblings “There’s only one highlight of my life. Having the honor of being Mom to Maya and Peter (aka her little monkeys).”

Davis was a pioneer and leader of numerous initiatives during her time at CSU. In recognition of her leadership in research, teaching, and extension, she became the first fully-promoted female professor in the Department of Soil and Crop Sciences in 2001.

She was the first CSU female faculty Fellow of the Societies. In addition to ASA and SSSA, she is also a Fellow of the Society of Soil and Water Conservation. Due to her focus on soil fertility and manure management, she built bridges between the Departments of Soil and Crop Sciences and Animal Sciences at CSU. Her visionary and selfless contributions have benefitted many at the department, college, university, national, and global scale. She is truly a legend whose impacts will be felt for generations.

One of Davis's key contributions was her commitment to creating opportunities for others. She had an extraordinary ability to see and support the realization of potential and excellence in people around her. She fostered international research collaborations that have supported training the next generation of scientists at multiple levels. She had 42 grad students throughout her career, including 13 Ph.D. and 29 master's students from Cape Verde, Ethiopia, Haiti, Indonesia, Kenya, Libya, Malaysia, Nigeria, and Thailand. And four of the master's students completed the Peace Corps Master's International program in Ecuador, Lesotho, Paraguay, and Senegal.

Davis made a lasting impact through her leadership within CSU and through her professional service. During her tenure as ASA president, she helped establish the first LGBTQ+ community in the Societies. She was one of the first female department heads in the CSU College of Agricultural Sciences, leading the Department of Horticulture and Landscape Architecture from 2016–2021. Her research spanned diverse subject areas and geographies while always maintaining a focus on serving the needs of producers of all scales.

Davis cared deeply about the world and people near and far. Her dream was to "end world hunger." She was unwavering in her belief and practice of helping others. Her social justice work includes volunteering with many food access organizations, helping individuals seeking asylum, and supporting the growth and inclusion of those from historically excluded identities.

In addition to her children and husband, Davis is also survived by her father Daniel Davis (Carol) and siblings Erik Davis (Jill), Emily Abraham (Alejandro), and Marc Davis (Susan) as well as her stepson Shade Swanson his wife Cathy Swanson and her grandchildren.

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