

Tribute to biofortification pioneers in Sergipe

For more than 40 years, four researchers have been dedicating their lives to the search for solutions to minimize the problems caused by malnutrition. As pioneers, these researchers were able to see that one of the solutions would come from exchanges between health sciences and agriculture. Basic staples with extra nutrients could help reversing the deficiency of micronutrients like iron, zinc and beta-carotene and, thus, reduce the number of cases of anemia and vision problems. At the 3rd Annual Biofortification Meeting in Brazil, (www.cpatc.embrapa.br/biofortbrasil/), to be held from May 31 to June 5, in Aracaju (SE), they will be paid tribute both to recognize the significance of their work and to inspire the new generations to pursue their dreams.

Ross Welch is one of the leading scientists of the USDA-ARS Robert W. Holley Center for Agriculture and Health, in New York, EUA. He won the National USDA-ARS Outstanding Senior Scientist of the Year Award (2003), which can be said to be the Nobel Prize for Food, for his research on the use of agriculture for the development of nutrient-rich staples and for his ability to lead and form teams.

Together with Ross Welch and Howdy Bouis, Robin Graham assisted in the development of the HarvestPlus program, a consortium of research centers worldwide working towards biofortification of staples in the diet of populations that are most affected by malnutrition. Among other donors, the program is supported by the World Bank and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. In 2008, Professor Graham was awarded the CM Donald medal by the Australian Society of Agronomy.

José Eduardo Dutra de Oliveira is a physician and a pioneer in the field of nutrology, a consultant for the World Health Organization and an active researcher at USP and Unesp despite his 80 years of age. He was the first Brazilian to chair the International Union of Nutritional Science. He always defended the combination of rice and beans as a legitimate source of protein, dedicated his entire life to the fight against anemia and is the author of researches that have become references such as heating the cold meals of sugar cane choppers to show how nutrition and productivity walk hand in hand.

Malaquias Batista Filho has a PhD in Public Health, is Professor Emeritus at the Federal University of Pernambuco and a member of the National Food Safety Committee (Consea). In 2008, he was paid tribute by the Brazilian Academy of Science for the leading role played in the fields of Nutrition and Public Health. In the Northeast, his key area of work, he has defended the consumption of palm as a source of Vitamin A and an alternative for the shortage of conventional foodstuff.

These four scientists will be paid tribute during the 3rd Annual Biofortification Meeting in Brazil because their work synthesizes the essence of projects targeting biofortification of staples. According to researcher Marília Nutti, the leader of the BioFort project and researcher at Embrapa Food Technology (Rio de Janeiro-RJ), these are personalities who refuse to give up on their ideals, use creativity to overcome difficulties and excel in the efficiency of their research, focusing on the benefits to the target public. "They make things happen, act promptly, have a clear view of how humanity can benefit from knowledge and are aware of the urgency of going from theory to practice. They are examples to be followed", Embrapa's researcher commented. The homage to the researchers is scheduled for June 1st at the Banese Auditorium, Aracaju (SE). For additional information, please go to: www.cpatc.embrapa.br/biofortbrasil/.

The 3rd Annual Biofortification meeting in Brazil is sponsored by Embrapa Food Technology and Embrapa Coastal Tablelands, in partnership with the HarvestPlus and AgroSalud programs and support from Monsanto, Nestlé, Pepsico and Halotek Fadel corporations.

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