

ICRISAT genebank head honored with top germplasm award

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Hyderabad, India (16 January 2014) - Dr Hari D Upadhyaya, Head of Genebank at the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) based in Hyderabad, India, was recently conferred the 2013 Frank N Meyer Medal for Plant Genetic Resources Award by the Crop Science Society of America (CSSA) at its annual meeting held in Tampa, Florida, USA.

In his award lecture on "Crop germplasm to overcome challenges to global food and nutritional security," Dr Upadhyaya emphasized on how large germplasm collections can meet the food and nutritional needs of the ever increasing world population, which would be over 9 billion by 2050, requiring over 70% increase in food production.

Leading his team at ICRISAT, along with national partners, new sources of variation for traits of economic importance such as drought, salinity, diseases, and desired agronomic attributes have been identified for economically important crops like chickpea, pigeonpea, groundnut, sorghum and millets. This has resulted in enhanced use of germplasm in crop improvement programs in developing high yielding cultivars with a broad genetic base.

"The daunting task to feed the world, particularly in view of climate change and its overall negative effect on agricultural production, changes in pest and disease dynamics, increased risk to food and feed contaminated by mycotoxin-producing

fungi, and decline in nutritional quality of food crops, could be met using germplasm collections," Dr Upadhyaya explained.

Dr Upadhyaya's work now places emphasis on exploring the use of crop wild relatives to enhance resistance to pest and diseases and for desired agronomic and nutritional traits, for use in crop improvement. He sees the increased use of agrobiodiversity together with modern genomics tools as the best bet in coping with new challenges to agricultural production.

The Frank N Meyer Medal is presented in commemoration of Frank N Meyer who served as Agricultural Explorer in the Office of Foreign Seed and Plant Introduction in the USA for outstanding achievements in the area of plant genetic resources. The memorial award was created in recognition of his contributions in the field of germplasm.

Some of the stalwarts to receive the Frank N Meyer Medal for Plant Genetic Resources include Drs Theodore Hymowitz (1988), Henry L Shands (1992), Calvin R Sperling (1995), Steve A Eberhart (1999), Geoffrey C Hawtin (2005), and Calvin O Qualset (2006).