

## František Kühn 1931–1995



So we will remember František Kühn: Consulting farmers in the field on traditional crop varieties and their cultivation (August 1981 in the White Carpathians, together with K. Pistrick, Gatersleben). Photo H. Ohle

With deep regret we have to announce, that František Kühn, an enthusiast of plant genetic resources from the Czech Republic, passed away recently, for many of his friends and colleagues rather unexpectedly.

His life was devoted to the study of cultivated plants and weeds, their variability, evolution, history in space and time and to the relations between crops, weeds and man. These topics fascinated him lifelong and travelling in the countryside, looking for old landraces, collecting specimens and discussing with the rural people the use, names and history of their traditional plants made him happy.

On Vilm, a small island close to Rügen in the Baltic sea, we met František Kühn again in autumn 1992 some years after his last visit to Gatersleben. The first years of severe political and economic changes in eastern parts of Europe had passed.

František Kühn suffered no more from futile and politically motivated restrictions, he was awarded the title of a professor at his university at Brno, Moravia, could continue teaching his students and was – as always – full of new ideas and plans. The symposium on Vilm offered excellent opportunities for discussions because it was focused on František Kühn's own main interests, on evolution of crop plants and agriculture and on the maintenance and conservation of genetic resources. He presented a lecture about evolution of crops in the frame of an agricultural system managed by industrial methods and illustrated traditional varieties of *Prunus* crops from his home country in Moravia (Kühn, 1993a and b).

For these research topics, as well as for palaeoethnobotany, weed research, especially geobotany of weed associations and their historical changes, he

obtained a strong reputation since long years and the same was true for taxonomic studies in special crop genera as *Triticum*, *Avena* or *Prunus*.

F. Kühn had developed a special approach for studying the landraces of crops and their characteristic weeds in Moravia and Slovakia, and could make spectacular discoveries as that of *Triticum dicoccon* Schrank in the White Beskid Mts. (Kühn, 1970), where emmer persisted as a relic crop much longer than in other parts of central Europe. This was just the time in the first half of the seventies when in Gatersleben a new program was initiated for the collection of plant genetic resources, which started in Central Europe where the genetic erosion had tremendously progressed but where indigenous races of crop plants could still be expected in traditional farming areas. For Slovakia František Kühn could be gained as local expert.

He engaged himself enthusiastically and successfully in the joint collecting missions, delivered strong inputs from his own long experience, that he largely influenced and improved our collecting approach. Thus, the typical "Gatersleben approach" for collecting plant genetic resources, reflects to a considerable degree František Kühn's activities (Hammer *et al.*, in press).

Several papers have been written about the joint collecting missions, more technical reports (Kühn *et al.*, 1982), detailed in descriptions of the cultivated floras of Moravia and Slovakia (Kühn *et al.*, 1976, 1980, 1984) and compilations on specific crops (Hammer *et al.*, 1981). A highlight of the joint field work was certainly the observation and study of one of the last European traditional slash-and-burn cultivation in far eastern parts of Slovakia, associated with specialised crops as *Secale cereale* L. var. *multicaule* Metzg., *Setaria italica* L. convar. *moharia* (Alef.) Körn. and *Avena sativa* L. subsp. *macrantha* (Hack.) Malz. and subsp. *nodipilosa* Malz. (Kühn & Hammer, 1979).

During these joint exploration missions František Kühn and the staff of the Gatersleben genebank and taxonomy department became close friends, tied closely together by the common efforts for studying and maintaining the indigenous crop variability.

František Kühn was born in Schulstein, not far from Königsberg in East Prussia on April 30, 1931, where his father worked as an agricultural engineer. His family returned to Moravia in the same year. Here František Kühn spent his school years. He studied Biology at the University of Brno, Faculty of Natural Sciences from 1949 to 1953. After finishing the University he joined the Agricultural University in Brno, Botanical Section,

at that time headed by Professor Rudolf Dostál, where he was working until his death.

František Kühn loved his country and his science. He was a prolific and accurate writer who published more than 200 papers (see Tempír 1991) and he liked to introduce and discuss the results of his research in international meetings. At the Symposium "Maintaining of Plant Genetic Resources in Agriculture and Forestry" in Witzenhausen (Germany) in November of 1994 we waited for him in vain. A Christmas card informed us that he was suffering from a malicious disease, yet he was optimistic and he announced a contribution for "Genetic Resources and Crop Evolution" on *Prunus*. He lost however the fight against his malady and passed away on February 19, 1995.

A detailed account on the life, the scientific career and scientific activities of František Kühn was published by his colleague Z. Tempír (1991) on the occasion of Kühn's 60th birthday (together with a list of his publications).

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