

In Memoriam Professor Dr. Zoltán Kertész (1943–2017)



To our deepest sorrow, Professor Dr. Zoltán Kertész, wheat breeder and the former Editor-in-Chief of the international quarterly *Cereal Research Communications* deceased 26th February, 2017.

He was born in Girincs, a small village in the north-eastern part of Hungary in 1943. He took his GCSE in a secondary technical school in Putnok, Hungary, where he had the chance to be trained in the agricultural technical assistance, too.

He started his studies at the University of Agricultural Sciences in Gödöllő, Hungary in 1964 and he participated in the research work on mutation of the Plant Breeding Department as a sophomore. He obtained a degree as agronomist in 1968. He was assistant lecturer at the Department of Genetics of the university during the following two years. His research areas were the breeding of perennial rye and the studying of the mutation of pea and for this latter research work he obtained his university doctor degree in 1971. He was an enthusiastic member of the at that time famous folk dance group of the university during the years spent in Gödöllő.

He joined the staff of the Cereal Research Institute in Szeged Hungary (at present: Cereal Research Non-Profit Ltd.) in 1971 as a junior then a senior wheat breeder and Head of Wheat Department. He obtained a year scholarship to CIMMYT in Mexico in 1974 where he had the opportunity to develop his professional knowledge under the leadership of the Nobel-Prize laureate, Professor Dr. N.E. Borlaug. He could gain further scientific experience during the scholarships to the United Kingdom in 1979 and to the USA in 1982.

He pursued postgraduate studies in plant genetics at the university in Gödöllő and received his diploma in plant genetics in 1975. He obtained the PhD degree for his thesis entitled “The yield potential of wheat as influenced by early selection” in 1982 and the DSc degree of the Agricultural Sciences of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS) for his thesis entitled “The application of conventional and novel screening methods in wheat breeding” in 1995.

His several decennial scientific and tutorial activities resulted in a rich oeuvre, including numerous productive wheat varieties and publications.

His main research areas were wheat breeding; improving the conventional and elaborating the novel wheat breeding techniques; researches in the development of hybrid wheat; improving the wheat screening and maintenance techniques to enhance the homogeneity of wheat genotypes; anther culture; the application of molecular markers and genetic transformation in wheat breeding.

During the more than 40-year wheat breeding activity he became the main and co-breeder of 223 candidate varieties, from which 64 winter wheat and 3 durum wheat varieties were registered (in which 53 received PVP, too) and he also participated in the domestic introduction of 3 foreign wheat varieties. He was a lead breeder, who not only scheduled new varieties, but also did the manual work, that is, crossing, testing and screening, to create them. The most spectacular success of his work as main breeder are GK Kalász and GK Élet; and as a co-breeder, GK Csillag, popular and widely grown wheat varieties, which made the Hungarian agriculture extremely profitable. The GK wheat varieties, with his improvements among them, were awarded by the Grand Award of the Hungarian Association for Innovation in 1997.

He was the author and co-author of more than 200 articles in Hungarian and in English. His oeuvre covers 20 book chapters, 48 research papers published in peer-reviewed journals, 141 abstracts in proceedings of conferences and 31 popular scientific articles. He was the Representative of Hungary in the European Association for Research and Plant Breeding (EUCARPIA) for years.

He was the second Editor-in-Chief of *Cereal Research Communications* (1992–2008) after the founder and Chief Editor, Prof. Z. Barabás. He was the Chairman and the Member of the Board of Directors of the Scientific Committee of Plant Breeders of HAS and as such he enhanced the scientists work and the scientific development for decades. He was leader and participant in scientific networks and projects in co-operation with Professors Dénes Dudits (Biological Research Centre of HAS in Szeged) and László Heszky (Department of Genetics of Szent István University in Gödöllő).

His devoted and splendid scientific and tutorial performance was awarded by the Academic Award in 1989; the Rudolf Fleischmann Award in 1997; and the Dénes Gábor Award in 2008. The Knight's Cross of the Hungarian Order of Merit Award was conferred on him in 2009.

He was the Head of Wheat Department for more than 20 years and he directed and coordinated the fundamental and applied research work of 10–12 scientists. After retiring he remained active as a research professor emeritus. His tutorial activity is connected with Szent István University in Gödöllő, where he became invited lecturer first and in

2002 Honorary Professor. From 2004 he became appointed lecturer on plant genetics and from 2008 the Head of Department on the remote Department of Cereal Breeding and Genetics at Cereal Research Non-Profit Ltd. in Szeged. He was the project leader, consultant or opponent of a number of students and PhD candidates, respectively.

The loss of Professor Dr. Zoltán Kertész is great and those who got to know him will deeply miss his creative and innovative ideas, wide knowledge and friendly and supporting personality. His scientific and wheat breeding heritage is being cared of and carried on. We are mourning for him together with his family: his beloved wife and breeder colleague, two daughters and four grandchildren. May he rest in peace.

János Pauk
Editor-in-Chief

János Matuz
Professor Emeritus, Wheat Breeder