

In memoriam

Nicholas F. Derera (1919–2011)

N.F. Derera, one of the most famous wheat breeders in the world, Fellow of the Australian Institute of Agricultural Science and appointed Member of the Order of Australia (1994) in the Queen's Birthday List (AM) died at age of 92, in Westmead Hospital, NSW, Australia on 7th October, 2011.

Nicholas Derera was born in Budapest, Hungary on 5th January 1919 and received his MS degree from the University of Technology and Economics, Faculty of Agriculture, Budapest. As a young fellow, he worked for small private, later large state owned seed companies as a plant breeder in his home country. After the Hungarian revolution (1956), he arrived with his wife and son in Australia as refugees. He was process worker, then laboratory assistant in 1957/58. From the end of 1958 through to 1961 he was a Research Agronomist with the New South Wales Department of Agriculture he had played a crucial role in the establishment of the cotton growing industry of Australia. He also discovered and described a wild cotton species, which was named *Gossypium nandewarensense* Derera.

In 1961, Nick Derera as he was known by the farmers, joined The University of Sydney as a Plant Breeder at The North West Wheat Research Institute, Narrabri. His research results over 1961–1981 included: Breeder and co-breeder of 11 new prime hard wheat cultivars namely Mendos, Gamut, Gamset, Timgalen, Gatcher, Songlen, Shortim, Timson, Sunkota, Suneca and Sunstar. Developed breeding methodologies such as Mechanical Mass Selection system, verification of the advantage of the "Limited Selection" system. Invented screening techniques for drought resistance, flag smut resistance, micro quality tests and sprouting damage resistance. He studied the role of awns and roots, particularly their importance regarding drought tolerance of the wheat plant. Nick Derera conducted intensive research into the problem of preharvest sprouting damage, consequently it became possible to breed white wheat tolerant to preharvest sprouting damage. He established an international cooperation concerning preharvest sprouting research and as an outcome, a series of International Symposia on Preharvest Sprouting in Cereals are in progress. Nick Derera is also author/editor of a book published in the USA entitled *Preharvest Field Sprouting in Cereals* (1989). He is author and co-author of 108 scientific, semi-popular and major conference papers. He retired as Director of Wheat Breeding in 1981.

After his retirement, and having moved to Sydney, he established the Agricultural Science Advisory Service and in his consultant capacity has a major involvement in the Australian Native Ornamental Plant Improvement program. He achieved much in these years too; as Adjunct Professor he was invited by the University of Sydney to cooperate with the Department of Crop Science and the University's Plant Breeding Institute to take part in the supervision of postgraduate students and to help in the establishment of horticultural

plant breeding, particularly paprika breeding programs. Nick Derera received the following awards: Fellow of the Australian Institute of Agricultural Science (1977) for outstanding contribution to the Agr. Science (FAIAST); Certificate of Appreciation for Services to the Community from the RSL (1979), NSW Branch; Farrer Memorial Medal (1981) for achievements in plant breeding (FMM); bronze plaque and citation from colleagues in Canada (1982) in recognition of research on pre-harvest sprouting damage in cereals; Rotary Award for Vocational Excellence (1983) for contribution to the wheat and cotton industries (RVE). Named as one of the “2000 outstanding scientists of the 20th century” and awarded a silver medal by the International Biographical Centre Cambridge (1999). He was appointed as a Member of the Order of Australia (1994) in the Queen’s Birthday List (AM).

Nick Derera was involved in breeding and research programs and developed many new ornamental varieties, the latest one an ornamental sweet chili named after his granddaughter “Halley 98”. Sadly, before he could finish the last selections he died on 7th October, 2011 leaving a wife, son, daughter-in-law, grandchildren and great grandchildren. In addition, he left his mark in this world with his contributions to Agriculture, Horticultural Industry, Farmers, Students and many more.

Nicholas Frederick Derera was a remarkable man and will be sadly missed.

Lajos Bona
Wheat Breeder
Member of the Editorial Board of CRC

Norbert Somogyi
Agricultural and Scientific Counselor