

Father of Plant Nematology wins Magsaysay Award

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Father of Plant Nematology Dr Romulo G Davide wins Magsaysay Award



Singapore: This year, the agricultural biotechnology sector had something to cheer for when the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay Awards for 2012 were announced. Academician Dr Romulo G Davide, known among his peers as the Father of Plant Nematology for his research on nematode pests that has helped farmers increase productivity, was given the award at a ceremony held on August 31.

In the Philippines where 40 percent of the labor force is employed in agriculture and food security is a major issue, Dr Davide has, as the award citation says, used "the tools of science and a great reserve of social empathy" to address the problem.

Dr Davide, 78, was honored by the Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation for "his steadfast passion in placing the power and discipline of science in the hands of Filipino farmers, who have consequently multiplied their yields, created productive farming communities, and rediscovered the dignity of their labor". He was nominated for the award in the category of Journalism, Literature, and the Creative Communication Arts.

The website of National Academy of Science and Technology, Philippines (NAST PHL) says his research on cultural and biological control of nematodes provided Filipino farmers with effective tools against nematodes, thereby increasing yield and income. He developed the first Philippine biological control agent (BIOCON) that can be used against nematode pests attacking crops such as vegetables, banana, potato, citrus, pineapple and rice. The product is an essential practical substitute for highly toxic and expensive chemical nematicides. Biocon is sold in the Philippines as well as in Australia and

Germany.

He introduced farming communities to the use of several high-yielding varieties of corn, root crops and legumes that have improved crop productivity. He launched the Corn-based Farmer-Scientists Training Program (FSTP) in Colawin, an innovative and multi-faceted program to turn farmers into farmer-scientists. He also introduced to farmers microbial fertilizers that can reduce the use of organic and inorganic fertilizers. The program empowered farmers in the province of Cebu in identifying appropriate technologies for their farms, thereby improving their productivity and enhancing entrepreneurial capabilities. The program has now been adopted nationwide.

Dr Davide's numerous awards include the Gregorio Y Zara Award for Applied Science given by the Philippine Association for the Advancement of Science (1986), Jose Rizal Pro Patria Gold Medal Award from the Philippine government (1994), and the Outstanding Agricultural Scientist by the Department of Agriculture (1994). He received his BS Agriculture degree from UPLB (1957), his MS degree from the Oklahoma State University (1962), and his PhD from the North Carolina State University (1966).

Other Magsaysay awardees for 2012 include Chen Shu-Chu from Taiwan, Kulandei Francis from India, Syeda Rizwana Hasan from Bangladesh, Yang Saing Koma from Cambodia, and Ambrosius Ruwindrijarto from Indonesia.

The awardees received a certificate, a medallion bearing the likeness of Magsaysay, and \$50,000 cash prize each at the presentation ceremony at Pasay City in the Philippines.