

OBITUARY

Sir Otto Frankel (1900-1998)

A founder of the genetic resources movement, Sir Otto Frankel coined the phrase "genetic resources" with Erna Bennett and described genetic material of plants, animals, other organisms which is so crucial now-a-days. He couldn't celebrate his birth centenary. The cruel destiny snatched him on 21st November 1998 at the age of 98 years, while he was in Australia. In 1965, a panel of experts on crop germplasm exploration was set up with Sir Otto Frankel as chair. FAO Technical conference on plant genetic resources took place in 1967, 1973 and 1981 wherein Sir Otto Frankel, Erna Bennett, R.O. Whyte, Jack R Harlan, T.T. Chang, Jack G. Hawkes played an important role. In 1972, Sir Otto Frankel's address to first United Nations Conference on Human Environment in Stockholm alarmed policy makers to establish international forum in order to save depleting genetic resources world wide. After several meetings, International Biological Programme (IBP) was evolved. Dr. Frankel published a document "FAO/IBP Survey of Crop Genetic Resources in their centres of origin" in 1973.

In 1974, International Board for Plant Genetic Resources (IBPGR, now IPGRI) was established. He was closely associated with IPGRI till the end of his life. In a special function, organized in his honour, IPGRI paid tribute to him. His two monographs "Conservation and Evolution (1981) and the "Conservation of Plant Genetic Diversity (1995) developed the scientific basis for protection and conservation of both domesticated/cultivated and wild diversity of crop. Dr. Frankel argued a great deal that humanity may take responsibility of protection of these resources. His concept solely was for free exchange of germplasm material for the benefit of humankind.

Dr. Frankel was born in Vienna in the year 1900. His love to agriculture led him to work all over the world. In 1935, he visited Russia and met great Russian geneticist N.I. Vavilov. In 1951, he became Chief of Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO) in Canberra, Australia. He was recipient of several awards. He was 'Fellow' of Royal Society of New Zealand, British Royal Society and the Australian Academy of Science. He was a Foreign Associate of the US National Academy of Sciences also.

Sir Otto Frankel is immortal. This doyen of PGR will remain with us for all the time to come. We owe our gratitude to the PGR visionary.

Jack R. Harlan (1917-1998)

The author of centres and non-centres of agricultural origins, Jack Harlan died on 26th August, 1998. No one with even a passing interest in plant genetic resources will ever forget him. The author of "Crops and Man", geneticist, plant explorer, plant breeders and archaeobotanist was a towering personality in the field of plant genetic resources for the last 50 years. With his work "Our vanishing genetic resources and genetics of disaster" in the 1970s, Dr. Harlan helped alert the world to the dangers of the loss of genetic diversity and alarmed the existing conservation system. With JMJ de Wet, he developed the concept of primary, secondary and tertiary gene pools and for their use in crop improvement work.

He established Crop Evolution Laboratory in the University of Illinois, USA. Prior to this, he spent most of his professional career at Oklahoma State University. There is a debate among plant genetic resources workers that no person ever knew as much about PGR diversity and its origin as Dr. Harlan. Probably this may remain true for future also.

Dr. Jack Harlan was recipient of number of recognitions and award. He was member of US National Academy of Sciences. He also served as President of Crop Science Society of USA and was Secretary of FAO Third International Technical Conference on Plant Genetic Resources in the year 1981.

We salute him for his stewardship in the field of plant genetic resources.