



In Memoriam Dr. Gheorghe ITTU (1944-2019)

When Dr. Gheorghe ITTU passed away on August 24 of 2019, the field of plant breeding lost one of its finest scientists, and many lost one of their best friends

Born at Dobromiru Vale in Dobrogea, Dr. Gheorghe Ittu graduated from the Bucharest Agronomy Institute „Nicolae Bălcescu” and, based on his academical record, he was hired to work in research, at the present National Agricultural Research & Development Institute Fundulea, where he spent his entire career from 1967 to his last days. Here he progressed from a simple researcher to chief of the Laboratory of breeding self-pollinated crops, member of the Academy of Agricultural and Forestry Sciences (ASAS), where he was elected in the leadership of the Section for field crops. He was also member of the Association of Agricultural Engineers, member of the Association of Breeders and Seed Producers, and member of the International Triticale Association.

At the Fundulea Institute, he met his future wife, Mariana, an outstanding scientist herself, with whom he formed over years a remarkable team.

His mentor in the first years of activity was Prof. Nichifor Ceapoiu, member of the Romanian Academy, who also supervised his PhD studies. From the very beginning Dr. Gheorghe Ittu demonstrated an unusual ability for hard working and exceptional aptitudes for research. His pioneering research during the doctorship studies led to the identification of the high protein line F26-70, with a genetic control of the high grain protein concentration different from the one present in other known high protein wheats. He received his doctorate in 1983 at age 39

from the Bucharest Agronomy Institute „Nicolae Bălcescu”.

In 1977-1978 he was an invited researcher at the Freising University – Germany, where he studied the milling and bread-making quality of Romanian and German wheat and proposed a new micro method for measuring wheat grain hardness. He further improved his knowledge of plant breeding in contacts with scientists from Technical University of München – Germany, Cambridge – UK, INRA Versailles – France and several US Universities.

His interest in new fields of the plant breeding science led him to investigate hybrid wheat, methods for advancing breeding generations, methods of testing and phenotyping for Aluminum tolerance, sprouting resistance, etc.

He was deeply involved in the wheat breeding program, had an essential contribution and is co-author to all wheat cultivars released by the Fundulea Institute, from the cultivar IULIA, registered in 1974 to the newest URSITA and VOINIC, expected to be registered in 2019. Each of these cultivars carry something of Dr. Ittu’s soul and efforts.

But Dr. Ittu’s main passion was the Triticale crop, to which he devoted most of his activity. Due to his work this new crop was introduced in Romania and an extraordinary genetic progress was achieved. From the first Romanian Triticale TF2, registered in 1984, to the new cultivar UTRIFUN, registered in 2018, Dr. Ittu succeeded in building an original plant type adapted to the Romanian environment, largely different from all triticale types bred

in the world. His contribution to the evolution of this species has been internationally recognized by the registration of several Fundulea triticale cultivars in Canada, Hungary, France, USA or the Moldova Republic, by their use in many triticale breeding programs all over the world and by the award of honorary life membership of International Triticale Association.

He made major contributions in the areas of promoting and producing the breeder seed of the new wheat and triticale cultivars bred at NARDI Fundulea and the share these cultivars occupy now in Romania and abroad is very much due to his efforts.

In addition to his direct involvement in the breeding work, Dr. Ittu performed theoretical

research related to breeding, reported in over 170 articles authored or co-authored by him and published in Romanian and International journals.

He spent much of his time mentoring and developing younger colleagues, to whom he applied the same high standard requirements he had used for himself.

In recognition of his achievements, he received high awards of the Romanian Academy and of the Academy for Agricultural and Forestry Sciences.

With a noble discretion he kept secret his health problems to the last days. He will be sorely missed by all who knew him and he will serve as inspiration for future generations of plant breeders.