



## Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research

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### Prize-Winning Agricultural Innovators Help Poor People Escape Poverty

#### *Crop disease fighters and a plant breeder known as 'Mr. Cowpea' among recipients of international award*

WASHINGTON, D.C. (4 December 2006)—A fungus used to ward off banana pests and diseases is helping to protect Uganda's staple food—one of the most important sources of income in East Africa's Great Lakes region. And a campaign to introduce nutrient-rich, traditional vegetables to the diet of Kenya's city-dwellers has led to improved health while creating new sources of income for local farmers.

Driving these and other innovations aimed at improving the lives and livelihoods of poor farmers in developing countries are the world-class agricultural researchers who have been selected to receive this year's Science Awards conferred today by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, or CGIAR ([www.cgiar.org](http://www.cgiar.org)).

"Poor farmers in developing countries are confronted with a seemingly unending series of challenges, ranging from erratic rainfall and poor soils to crop and livestock diseases," said CGIAR Director Francisco Reifschneider, when announcing the awards at the CGIAR meeting, attended by hundreds of international agricultural researchers and development specialists. "This year's awardees are applying innovative science and technology to these and other challenges to make a difference in the lives of millions of poor farm families."

Seven awards recognizing individuals and teams for scientific achievement were given:

**Ram P. Thakur**, a plant pathologist with the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics ([www.icrisat.org](http://www.icrisat.org)), is awarded the **Outstanding Scientist Award** for his work on managing major diseases in pearl millet and sorghum, key cereal grain crops grown in arid regions, which provide food, feed, fodder, fuel, and temporary construction material as well. Dr. Thakur's research on the devastating and widespread millet disease known as downy mildew has led to the development of new, disease-resistant hybrids, including the first-ever product of molecular marker-assisted selection breeding that was released for cultivation in India in 2005. Widely planted, disease-resistant hybrids have helped to avert huge economic losses and hunger in many parts of India.

**Thomas Dubois**, a biocontrol specialist with the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture ([www.iita.org](http://www.iita.org)), is recipient of the **Promising Young Scientist Award** for his work to improve bananas in the Great Lakes region of Eastern Africa, where the plant is often the chief contributor to household income. Dr. Dubois developed enhanced tissue culture planting material—created from the banana's cells—that is resistant to pests and diseases. The material, intentionally infected with a beneficial fungus, offers protection against pests and diseases and has been delivered to farmers via an innovative public-private partnership.

The **Outstanding Senior Scientist Award** is given to **Bir Bahadur Singh**, a plant breeder at the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture ([www.iita.org](http://www.iita.org)) widely known as Mr. Cowpea, whose many contributions include a fast-maturing “60-day” cowpea variety for the tropics, seeds with resistance to more than 10 diseases, and drought- and heat-tolerant varieties of the legume. Cowpea is one of Africa’s most versatile crops—it feeds people and livestock and, as a nitrogen-fixing legume, it improves soil fertility. Dr. Singh’s more reliable varieties help ensure that this early-maturing “hungry season” crop provides income and sustenance in the period before cereal crops are harvested.

For his work to reintroduce traditional leafy vegetables to the Kenyan diet, **Patrick Maunda** of Bioversity International ([www.bioversityinternational.org](http://www.bioversityinternational.org)) received the **Outstanding Communications Award**. This innovative campaign to promote consumption of micronutrient-rich traditional vegetables used sophisticated marketing techniques to increase sales of the leafy greens in Nairobi supermarkets by 1100 percent over just two years. Lack of micronutrients afflicts 2 billion people worldwide, mostly women and young children. It is one side of the double burden of malnutrition and escalating rates of obesity, heart disease, and type II diabetes increasingly seen in developing countries. The campaign used colorful pamphlets with recipe ideas and information about nutrition to increase consumption and boost the incomes of a thriving network of suppliers.

The **Outstanding Scientific Article** is awarded to scientists of the International Livestock Research Institute ([www.ilri.org](http://www.ilri.org)) and The Institute for Genomic Research ([www.tigr.org](http://www.tigr.org)) for a paper published in the journal *Science*. The article suggests that researchers have passed a milestone in the development of a new generation of vaccines against parasitic diseases, including East Coast fever, a cattle disease common in 11 African countries that kills more than 1 million animals a year. A candidate vaccine undergoing trials in Kenya would be priced within reach of the very poor. In East Africa, the death of a single dairy cow—often a farmer’s primary source of income—can mean the loss of a family’s livelihood.

**Luz Marina Alvaré** at the International Food Policy Research Institute ([www.ifrpi.org](http://www.ifrpi.org)) and her team of information managers, IT professionals, and researchers from across the CG system received the **Outstanding Scientific Support Award** for an 18-month effort that culminated in the launch of the CGIAR Virtual Library (<http://vlibrary.cgiar.org>). Researchers can now use a single Internet gateway to simultaneously search the online libraries of the CGIAR Centers as well as more than 160 outside databases, including the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Library of Congress, London School of Economics, and AGRIS. CGIAR researchers have the additional option of accessing full-text articles from over 4,000 open-access periodicals and CGIAR Library Consortium subscription journals.

Eleven CGIAR Centers ([www.cgiar.org](http://www.cgiar.org)) share the 2006 **Outstanding Partnership Award** for the work of the CGIAR genebanks, which hold plant genetic resources in trust for the world community. The genebanks, which safeguard 600,000 accessions of crop, forest, and agroforestry species—the majority of which are stored as seeds—provide an insurance policy of sorts, underwriting food security and preserving genetic diversity well into the future. Scientists from around the world have drawn on the Genebank for wild relatives of common crops whose desirable traits, such as disease resistance and drought tolerance, are bred into new varieties. The CGIAR genebanks—oriented toward those varieties that are useful to poor farmers—represent the most important international effort to conserve plant genetic resources.

The CGIAR is a strategic agricultural research alliance dedicated to generating and applying the best available knowledge to stimulate agricultural growth, raise farmers’ incomes, and protect the environment. It supports 15 research centers worldwide conducting groundbreaking work to nourish the future. For more information, please visit [www.cgiar.org](http://www.cgiar.org).