In memoriam

Dr. Milutin Penčić
(1928-2021)

Milutin Penčić was born in Gradište, in the vicinity of Pirot, on August 16, 1928. He defened his PhD thesis entiteled "Biological and Economical Traits of Oat Populations (Varieties) of Central Serbia", at the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Belgrade in 1962.

In 1953, he started working as an assistant in the Department for Breeding and Seed production at the Agricultural Research Institute in Kruševac. He was engaged in collecting and breeding oat varieties. Furthermore, he worked within the field of small grain breeding until 1958, when he moved to work at the Maize Research Institute, Zemun Polje.

During his engagement at the Maize Research Institute, Zemun Polje, he was elected in all scientific titles from the assistant to the scientific advisor, as well as a head of the Department of Physiology, a head of the R&D Department, an assistant director, deputy director and a director general. In the early 1960s he founded a laboratory of physiology. He was one of the first scientist to work on the application of radioisotopes and radioactive radiation within the field of plant physiology and genetics, thanks to the fact that he graduated from the School of Radioisotope Application in Vinča in 1959/60. Moreover, he had an advanced training on the application of radioisotopes in studying plant physiology at the Institute for Biophysics of the Academy of Science of the USSR in St. Petersburg and at the Moscow Timiryzev Agricultural Academy. In 1960/62, as an IAEA scholarship holder, he had a six-month advanced training in St. Petersburg, on the topic "The Application of Nuclear Energy in Plant Physiology".

Dr Milutin Penčić contributed to the conservation of genetic resources through the collection of local population, studying of traits of landraces with the aim to classify them while preparing the documentation according to the tandard methodology, which facilitated the use and the exchange of the materials; to studying of combining abilities or landraces with specific combining abilities with four elite genotypes or inbred lines that were mainly used in the development of hybrids or different genetic backgrounds. At the same time, he promoted the international cooperation, especially in terms of material exchange, due to his participation in the FAO Research Network – within the IBGR.

In the Minstry of Agriculture, he was in charge of the project "The Establishment of the Plant Gene Bank" with two subprojects "The Establishment of the Plant Gene Bank of Yugoslavia" and "The Gene Pool Formation for the Needs of the Plant Gene Bank of Yugoslavia". In order to implement these projects, he gathered 26 institutions involved into breeding of cereals, fodder plants, vegetables and other plant species, with the task of preparing proposals for their own collections. The engagement of Milutin Penčić in the formation of the national programme and organised activities on plant genetic resources in the former Yugoslavia is one of the visionary endeavours.

As an expert of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations, Dr. Penčić have participated in the development and the implementation of the national programmes on scientific and research work and the improvement of the maize production in Tanzania, Mozambique and Angola. He was an expert of the Federal Ministry of the Development, Science and Technology, as well as a member of the Yugoslav Society for Plant Physiology and the Serbian Genetic Society. He was the President of the Yugoslav Academy of Engineering (JINA) and the President of the Association for Protection of Biological Diversity of Agriculture of Yugoslavia (AGROGEN YU).

Dr. Penčić was the President of the Steering Committee of the FAO/UNDP of the European Cooperative Programme for Crop Genetic Resources – ECP/GR, coordinator of the FAO European Cooperative Research Network on Maize, national coordinator and the member of the executive committee of ECP/GR, the member of the Yugoslav Commission for UNESCO, the President of the Yugoslav delegation in the cooperative scientific and research programme of the COMECON – a member of the Council of the Federation Committee on Science, the President of the Continuous Conference of Scientific and Research Organisations of Belgrade and the member of the Commission of Genetic Resources for FAO.

As the national coordinator of the European Cooperative Programme for Crop Genetic Resources (ECP/GR), he significantly influenced the introduction of many young researchers into technologies for conservation of genetic resources and raising awareness of the social influence on this activity and the acceptance of unified standards: IBPGR – the International Board for Plant Genetic Resources and for managing collections in breeding institutions.

Dr. Penčić is the author and the co-author of 131 bibliographic units, 32 of which have been published abroad. All his papers can be roughly divided into two groups: physiology of plants, primarily maize, and plant genetics and breeding, genetic resources.