

Press release, 24 November 2015

Presentation of the SFIAR Research Awards 2015

Improved harvests in Ethiopia thanks to research from Bern

On 25 November, the Swiss Forum for International Agricultural Research (SFIAR) will present this year's research award to Zerihun Tadele from the University of Bern and his team. They have succeeded in breeding resistant cultivars of tef, a staple food in Ethiopia similar to millet. The SFIAR will also honour Madeleine Kaufmann for her master's thesis on agrobiodiversity, which she completed at the School of Agricultural, Forest and Food Sciences (HAFL), Bern University of Applied Sciences.

Improved harvests in Ethiopia

Tef, an Ethiopian cereal similar to millet, has long been ignored by agricultural researchers. However, Zerihun Tadele and his team set out to improve the productivity of this cereal. The SFIAR Team Award honours their many years of breeding work and the soon-to-be-finished field trials, thanks to which they and their Ethiopian partners have succeeded in developing new, resistant cultivars of tef. The research team at the University of Bern used modern genetic, molecular and genomic analytical methods to breed tef plants with the desired traits. The result of this process was tef plants with shorter stems and better resistance to drought, which the researchers then cross-bred in Ethiopia with local types.

Once approved, the new tef cultivars will be made available to Ethiopian smallholders. It is hoped that in this way, the significant crop losses so far experienced due to lodging and drought will in future be prevented. This is of great importance because tef is a staple food for about 50 million Ethiopians. It is tolerant to extreme environmental conditions, can be safely stored and is very nutritious.

Maintaining biodiversity on Cuban smallholdings

The SFIAR Master's Thesis Award goes to Madeleine Kaufmann, graduate of the School of Agricultural, Forest and Food Sciences (HAFL). She was able to show that Cuban smallholders make a significant contribution to the maintenance of biodiversity in a nature reserve by using traditional agricultural methods and numerous local crops and wild plants. For her research, she interviewed farmers, compiled landscape profiles and organised a workshop with the local population.

The lack of medical services, education and basic infrastructure lead many young people to migrate to urban areas. Traditional knowledge is gradually being lost. The concept of the nature reserve is not widely known and the legal framework not clearly defined. Madeleine Kaufmann therefore recommends that the Cuban authorities take urgent measures in these areas in order to improve the situation for both the rural population and the nature reserve.

Awards ceremony

The SFIAR will present the SFIAR Team Award 2015, endowed with CHF10,000, to Zerihun Tadele and the SFIAR Master's Thesis Award, endowed with CHF1,000, to Madeleine Kaufmann on Wednesday 25 November 2015 (4.15 - 6:30pm) at the University of Bern during the *Orphan crops and agrobiodiversity - Potential and challenges for food and nutrition security* public event.

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SFIAR Research Awards

Numerous Swiss institutions are engaged in agricultural research for development. With the aim of supporting this research effort, the Swiss Forum for International Agricultural Research (SFIAR) has been honouring innovative Swiss projects with annual awards since 2008. The award is sponsored by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Syngenta Foundation for Sustainable Agriculture.

Further information about the projects together with photos can be found at www.sfiar.ch/award.

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