ICRISAT International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics
Science with a human face

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ICRISAT scientist receives topmost honor from Crop Science Society of America

Hyderabad, India (02 December 2015) — Recognizing outstanding contributions made in the area of crop science, the Crop Science Society of America (CSSA) during its annual meeting in Minnesota, USA recently conferred the 2015 Fellowship to Dr Rajeev Varshney, Director -Research Program on Grain Legumes and Center of Excellence in Genomics, International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT).

This is the highest recognition given by the society to about 0.3% of the society's active and emeritus members for their professional achievements and meritorious service.

The fellowship was conferred recognizing Dr Varshney's work in developing and deploying genomic resources in breeding of chickpea, pigeonpea and peanut— three important staple food crops in the developing world but often under-recognized. This work was led by ICRISAT under the leadership of Dr Varshney and various partners worldwide.

"I feel humbled and privileged to receive this recognition. Indeed, this would not have been possible without the hard work of colleagues and collaborators from ICRISAT and outside that has made it possible to transform our science into products to empower poor farmers in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia," said Dr Varshney after receiving the honor from CSSA President Professor Roch E Gaussoin in Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA.

"Working together with partners, ICRISAT has made amazing progress in the area of genomics and molecular breeding. We have molecular breeding products in fields and we have developed large-scale genomic resources by working with strategic partners from a number of advanced research institutes, National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS), international donors, and private sector organizations," said Dr David Bergvinson, Director General, ICRISAT.

Professor MS Swaminathan, noted agricultural scientist and ICRISAT Ambassador of Goodwill in his message said, "This is not just an honor for Rajeev Varshney of ICRISAT, but for the whole CGIAR system and India. Rajeev's outstanding contribution to legume genomics and molecular breeding deserved this honor."

"One of the important aspects of Dr Varshney's research at ICRISAT is that he not only got his work published in high-impact journals, but he also worked closely with breeders to help translate genome information in agriculture by developing superior lines for important legume crops," said Dr Jeff Ehlers, Senior Program Officer, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

ICRISAT-led multi-institutional teams under the leadership of Dr Varshney sequenced the genomes of pigeonpea and chickpea that were published in Nature Biotechnology journal in 2011 and 2013, respectively.

ICRISAT developed and deployed genomic resources in crop breeding as a part of several projects such as the Bill &

Melinda Gates Foundation funded project Tropical Legumes I and II and the ongoing phase III ; projects from Generation Challenge Program (GCP); and Integrated Breeding Platform (IBP).

“Development of several superior lines for drought tolerance and disease resistance are a testament of the high-quality research of Rajeev Varshney for impact in developing countries in Asia and Africa,” said Dr Jean-Marcel Ribaut, Director, Generation Challenge Program & Integrated Breeding Program, Mexico.

ICRISAT has developed superior lines resistant to foliar disease as well as improved lines with enhanced oil quality through molecular breeding in peanut. These findings have been published in Theoretical and Applied Genetics in 2013 and Plant Science in 2015, respectively. ICRISAT is leading a project funded by MARS Inc. and the Peanut Foundation.

Dr Victor Nwosu, Chairman, Governing Board, The Peanut Foundation, USA and Program Manager, MARS Inc. said, “It is wonderful to see molecular breeding products for important traits not only for agronomic traits relevant to farmers but also for confectionery industry”.

ICRISAT has been engaged with several institutes such as the Beijing Genomics Institute (BGI)-Shenzhen, China, the world’s largest genome sequencing and analysis center to generate and analyze genome sequence data, for over seven years.

Highlighting the collaboration with ICRISAT, Dr Huangming Yang, Chairman of BGI-Shenzhen, said, “It’s a privilege working with ICRISAT and we are pleased to see translation of genomics research in agriculture. After generating genome sequence for the mandate crops (chickpea, pigeonpea, groundnut, sorghum and pearl millet), ICRISAT is engaged in sequencing large-scale germplasm collections to identify the superior alleles for traits of interest to breeders.”

“We have embarked on the 3000 Chickpea Genome Sequencing Project, one of the few large-scale plant genome sequencing projects at the international level, which will help us to understand the genome architecture and design new chickpea varieties. We have not only worked on upstream research driven projects, but we have also touched the lives of more than 50 million people across Asia and Africa through legume breeding and seed delivery system initiatives as a part of the Tropical Legumes projects (II and III),” said Dr Varshney.

Funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, ICRISAT is leading the Tropical Legumes III project to work in nine countries in Africa and India.

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About ICRISAT

The **International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid-Tropics** (ICRISAT) is a non-profit, non-political organization that conducts agricultural research for development in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa with a wide array of partners throughout the world. Covering 6.5 million square kilometers of land in 55 countries, the semi-arid tropics have over 2 billion people, and 644 million of these are the poorest of the poor. ICRISAT innovations help the dryland poor move from poverty to prosperity by harnessing markets while managing risks – a strategy called Inclusive Market- Oriented development (IMOD). ICRISAT is headquartered in Patancheru, Hyderabad, Telangana, India, with two regional hubs and six country offices in sub-Saharan Africa. It is a member of the CGIAR Consortium.

About ICRISAT: www.icrisat.org; For ICRISAT’s scientific information see: http://EXPLOREit.icrisat.org

CGIAR is a global agriculture research partnership for a food secure future. Its science is carried out by 15 research Centers who are members of the CGIAR Consortium in collaboration with hundreds of partner organizations. www.cgiar.org