

Rena Martins Farias

Rena Martins Farias was born in São Salvador da Baía, in Brazil in 1934. During her childhood the smells, colours and flavours of foods enchanted her. One of the first graduates of Birmingham University's M Sc course on plant genetic resources, Rena Martins Farhas has devoted the past 40 years to the conservation and use of plant genetic resources. Starting in the 1970s, Farias worked as a plant collector, carrying out nearly 70 collecting missions in Cyprus, Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey. She was instrumental in the establishment in 1996 of the "Banco Português de Germoplasma Vegetal - BPGV" facilities in her adopted country of Portugal. She has been tireless in her efforts to ensure the conservation of Portugal's native diversity. Throughout the years she has demonstrated a continuing commitment to international collaboration and to building strong links with scientific partners around the world. Farias retired in 2004 but she has continued to 'spread the word,' advising and inspiring researcher. On 5 September 2006, the Portuguese government recognized Farias' lifetime achievements by awarding her the "Order of Agriculture, Commercial and Industrial Merit", "Class of Agriculture Merit".

Dear colleagues

Please find attached a letter in support of the nomination of Rena Farias for an Award as Guardian of Diversity in 2010.

<<Rena Farias support.doc>>

With best regards

Toby Hodgkin

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Announcement

Bioversity International, Bioversity for short, is the operating name of the International Plant Genetic Resources Institute (IPGRI) and the International Network for Improvement of Banana and Plantain (INIBAP). With our partners, we undertake research aimed at improving people's lives through the use and conservation of agricultural biodiversity.

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1 April 2010

Dear Colleagues

Subject: Call for nominations for Guardians of Diversity in the Mediterranean- confidential letter of support for Rena Martins Farias

I write to support the nomination of Rena Martins Farias for the Guardians of Diversity Award in 2010. In this International Year of Biodiversity the award will take on a particular significance and I consider Rena would be a particularly worthy recipient of the award in this special year.

Over the last 40 years Rena has demonstrated total commitment to the conservation and use of plant genetic resources. One of the first to graduate from the Birmingham University M Sc course on plant genetic resources, she made a significant contribution to the conservation of diversity in the Mediterranean through her early collecting activities in the 1970s. This involved collecting activities in Turkey, Morocco, Cyprus and Tunisia among others. Over the years her activities with others in the Mediterranean, within and outside the framework of the European Cooperative Programme on Plant Genetic Resources, have demonstrated her continuing commitment to international collaboration and to building a strong set of linkages to support conservation of plant genetic resources. In the last few years her contribution to conservation of *Allium* spp. and medicinal and aromatic plants has been particularly significant.

Her work in support of the establishment of the Banco Portugues de Germoplasma Vegetal and the contributions that she has made to the conservation of Portuguese plant genetic resources provide perhaps the strongest justification for recognizing Rena as a Guardian of Diversity. Her achievements in this area including the establishment in 1994 of the BPGV reflect her tireless efforts to ensure Portugal's diversity is properly conserved and her recognition of what was required as one of the primary pillars of an effective national conservation system.

On 5 September 2006 the Portuguese government recognized her lifetime achievements through the award of the "Order of Agriculture, Commercial and Industrial Merit", "Class of Agriculture Merit". Having known her personally since we met in Birmingham, I believe that recognition as a Guardian of Diversity would be a fitting and well-deserved complement to this recognition by Portugal. .

Toby Hodgkin

Principal Scientist

Bioversity International

Dear Sirs,

Please find attached a brief narrative statement describing Rena Martins Farias qualifications to be a Guardian of Diversity in the Mediterranean.

Two confidential letters of support from Prof. Maria de Fátima Brioso Quedas and Dr. Toby Hodgkin, whom are familiar with the nominee's work, have been sought by the nominators and have been e-mailed directly by the supporters to this same e-address.

Both, the nominee and the nominators contact details are sent below.

Yours sincerely,
Eliseu Bettencourt

Nominee:

Name: **Rena Martins Farias**

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Nominators:

Name: **Ana Maria Barata**

Address: Instituto Nacional de Recursos Biológicos,I.P.

INRB/INIA

Banco Português de Germoplasma Vegetal

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Name: **Eliseu Bettencourt**

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Rena Martins Farias was born in São Salvador da Bahia, in Brazil in 1934. Rena studied Natural History, specializing in botany. Her other passion, the mission of “spreading the word”, led her to teaching.

A perfect combination for a “missionary”, to pursue the study and understanding of life, while instilling the notion and sense of responsibility within the young generations as to the importance of living in harmony with Nature. Rena’s free spirit and strong determination did not always fit in with what was officially acceptable in her home country at that time and that led her from her native Brazil to the cradle of humanity - Africa. After visiting a number of countries of West Africa among which, Ghana and Nigeria, Rena went to the United Kingdom and the city of Birmingham. It was 1970 and the first MSc. course in Plant Genetic Resources (PGR) was being taught at The University of Birmingham. Rena was part of the first group that graduated in PGR. After that, a PhD in PGR followed in 1976. Plant Genetic Resources was thereafter her commitment. Preventing genetic erosion, understanding the origin and distribution of crop diversity, collecting and conserving germplasm, became her first and ultimate goal. For several years the entire Mediterranean was her home. As a FAO/IBPGR collector, Rena Farias travelled from country to country raiding for the vanishing diversity. That relentless search for everthinning plant diversity took her, among other countries, to Cyprus, Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey, then, in 1977, to Portugal. Portugal was fortunate indeed that Rena decided to settle there as the country was, and in a sense, still is, rich in diversity, where so much still remained to be collected and safeguarded for the welfare of the present and future generations. Her tough determination that lay beneath a remarkably kind, sweet smile and gentle manners, led the way for the establishment of a genebank in the ex Unit for Maize Breeding (NUMI), in Braga. Reorganization determined the moving of NUMI’s infrastructure to another location. That was a chance that Rena couldn’t miss and she seized the opportunity with both hands. Her persuasiveness was, once again, a powerful tool. In 1996 the new “Banco Português de Germoplasma Vegetal - BPGV” facilities were inaugurated, located in another state property in Braga. It was her life achievement. She had planted a seed! In 2004 Rena retired from her official position, but not from her commitment! She is still actively “spreading the word”, coordinating and advising research projects and, with her strength, determination and stamina, she is an example for all those committed to carrying on the torch! Rena Farias’ achievements in the field of plant genetic resources have achieved her recognition not only among her peers but also at the official level. On 5 September 2006 she was awarded, by the Government of Portugal, the “Order of Agriculture, Commercial and Industrial Merit”, “Class of Agriculture Merit”.

Nominee:

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Nominators:

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Dear Sirs,

Following the request of Mr. Eliseu Bettencourt and Mrs. Ana Maria Barata (nominators), I'm pleased to join my letter of support to the [nomination of Dr. Rena Martins Farias for Guardian of Diversity in the Mediterranean.](#)

Kind regards,

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Santarém, 31 de Março de 2010

Subject: Guardian of Diversity in the Mediterranean - Letter of support of the nominee
Rena Martins Farias

I finished my Agronomy degree and undertook the fascinating route of plant breeding and genetics in 1980. By that time Rena Martins Farias had already carried out a remarkable work on the Mediterranean and Portuguese germplasm collecting, and conservation, making considerable contributions to the deeper understanding and better managing genetic diversity.

To meet her was first to get acquainted with the sunny smile that is the trademark of her worship to plant genetic resources and the farmers who grow, maintain and develop them.

In her talks and classes, the ins and outs of germplasm safeguard spring up as links of a generous chain of biodiversity and human stories and heritages that must be indefinitely prolonged into the future.

A transparent cause served by an unshakeable resolution allowed her to achieve the ultimate goal: the new Banco Português de Germoplasma Vegetal, inaugurated in 1996, a facility totally devoted to plant genetic resources, that keeps, among others, a safe duplicate of a collection of Mediterranean maize accessions made by Rena Farias before she settled down in Portugal.

The sunny smile paved the way for a sunny link of the chain. The chain we owe to the guardians of diversity.

This letter is an unequivocal support of Rena's work and contribution to the safeguard of the Mediterranean plant diversity wealth and in endorsement of her nomination to be a Guardian of Diversity in the Mediterranean.

