



GENERAL  
FOODS  
WORLD  
FOOD  
PRIZE

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**BIOGRAPHY: DR. MONKOMBU SAMBASIVAN SWAMINATHAN**

Dr. Monkombu Sambasivan Swaminathan, winner of the first annual General Foods World Food Prize, is known as the architect of India's Green Revolution.

The General Food World Food Prize, including a \$200,000 cash award, is the latest in a series of prestigious international awards the laureate has won. In 1986, Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, a former Secretary of Agriculture and Member of the Planning Commission of the Indian Government, received the Albert Einstein World Science Award. Indian President Giani Zail Singh presented him with the "Krishni Ratna" prize for dedication "to the cause of agro-science." At least 23 institutions of higher learning have awarded him honorary D.Sc. degrees.

Born Aug. 7, 1925, in Kumbakonam, a village in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, Dr. Swaminathan is the son of a surgeon credited with helping to eradicate the disease popularly known as elephantiasis. After graduating from Coimbatore Agricultural College, Dr. Swaminathan earned his Ph.D. in genetics from Cambridge University in 1952. He then worked as a research associate at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, where his research on the potato plant led to the development of a variety known as "Alaska Frostless."

Joining the Indian Agricultural Research Institute in 1954, he worked in this branch of the Indian Civil Service until 1972 as a wheat and rice geneticist. During the next seven years, Dr. Swaminathan served as Director-General of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research. He was Secretary of Agriculture from 1979-80 and served for the next two years as a Member of the Planning Commission of the Indian Government.

The laureate is renowned for his leading role in India's National Demonstration Programme, begun in 1964. Under this programme, high-yield varieties of wheat and rice seedlings were planted in the fields of India's poorest farmers. Dr. Swaminathan recognized the value of introducing Mexican semi-dwarf wheat plants to India to circumvent the problems that resulted when tall, native varieties of wheat were fertilized and subsequently "lodged," or toppled over.

The fertility of these "miracle grains" converted a generation of Indian farmers to belief in the efficacy of using fertilizer and other modern farming methods. Thus, the famine that threatened India in the early 1960s was averted, and India was transformed from an agricultural "basket case" into a "bread basket."

In 1979, when a drought threatened to wipe out the gains India had made, Dr. Swaminathan converted this crisis into an opportunity for progress by streamlining the nation's system of

disaster-preparedness. Today the nation feeds itself, exports foodstuffs, and possesses 30 million tons of grain reserves.

When internationally acclaimed scientist Dr. Norman Borlaug won the 1970 Nobel Peace Prize for his agricultural work in India, he commented: "To you, Dr. Swaminathan, a great deal of credit must go for first recognizing the value of the Mexican dwarfs (wheat seedlings). Had this not occurred, it is quite possible that there would not have been a green revolution in Asia."

A versatile and many-faceted scholar, Dr. Swaminathan counts among his many accomplishments the creation of a "Techniracy" program in which illiterate rural dwellers became technically literate through on-the-job experience and "learning by doing."

Well aware of the close link between conservation and development, the laureate has worked to advance ecological causes by serving as honorary vice-president of the World Wildlife Fund and president of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. His career-long sensitivity to the heavy productive and reproductive burdens borne by Third World women was cited when Dr. Swaminathan received the 1985 Association for Women in Development Award.

Since 1982, he has served as director general of the International Rice Research Institute in Los Banos, the Philippines. There, at the International Rice Germplasm Center,

samples of 75,000 different varieties of the world's 125,000 types of rice seedlings are stored. Since rice is the staple grain of at least 1/3 of the world's population, the contribution this institution makes to the growth of Third World agriculture cannot be overestimated.

Dr. Swaminathan is counted among the members of a number of erudite international organizations, including the Royal Society of London, the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, the USSR All-Union Academy of Agriculture and Forestry and the Royal Swedish Academy of Agriculture and Forestry.

The laureate also served as independent chairman of the FAO Council from 1981 to 1985. He is a member of the board of directors of the Better World Society.

Married to economist Mina B. Swaminathan, he is the father of three daughters.

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