

In brief

■ 50 years of international rice research

This year the International Rice Research Institute – IRRI – based in Los Baños, Philippines, is celebrating its 50th birthday. To mark this anniversary Dr Achim Dobermann, research director of IRRI, provided an overview of global rice research in the 21st century at the “Tropentag”, an annual international conference on tropical and subtropical agricultural research held in Zürich, Switzerland in September 2010. Rice farming has an annual value of over 150 billion US dollars and directly or indirectly affects over 2 billion people who either depend on rice as their food staple or are involved in its production. Rice is often the only food that 400 million of the chronically hungry have to eat, reported Dr Dobermann.

Rice is not only the staple food of Asia, it is also rising in importance in Africa and Latin America. According to the IRRI research director, international rice research has adapted to this trend. IRRI, the African Rice Center in Benin and the International Center for Tropical Agriculture in Colombia have

joined forces under the umbrella of the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) with the aim of improving rice productivity in changing environmental, economic, demographic, and social landscapes. The resultant research efforts will be reflected in the Global Rice Science Partnership (GRiSP), one of CGIAR’s mega-programmes for the next century. (wi)

■ Could self-vaccinating cattle cut disease?

Malaysian scientists are testing a vaccine that spreads by itself as a solution to haemorrhagic septicaemia, a highly infectious buffalo and cattle disease that costs millions of dollars a year, SciDev.Net reported in September 2010. Haemorrhagic septicaemia is hard to vaccinate against where livestock roam freely, because animals are difficult to capture and restrain long enough for an injection. Scientists have now developed a live vaccine – a disabled form of the bacterium that triggers an immune response without causing the disease. Researchers spray the vaccine up an animal’s nose and

they breathe it out, where it remains airborne and is inhaled by animals within two metres of them. Haemorrhagic septicaemia is a fatal bacterial disease found in buffalo and cattle in many African, Asian and Middle Eastern countries. (SciDev.Net)

■ Intercropping increases harvest yields

The simultaneous cultivation of two or more crops on a single field – known as intercropping – increases harvest yields. This was reported by agricultural scientists of the Institute of Crop Science at the University of Hohenheim in Germany in their current study entitled “Extension and evaluation of intercropping field trials using spatial models”. The scientists tested a combination of maize/wheat in China as well as maize/legume and maize/peanuts in Germany. In two out of three cases higher grain and dry matter yields were obtained – an average of 20 to 30 percent higher than in monocultures. The study was included in the Research Highlight Program 2010 of the American Society of Agronomy. (University of Hohenheim/ib)



Photo: J. Boethling