

Egyptian wins prize for research in Brazil

Nagib Nassar lives in the country since the 1970s and has developed hybrid manioc plants with higher protein contents to help fight hunger. In December, he will be awarded a prize from Kuwait for his work.

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São Paulo – The Egyptian-born, Brazilian-based Nagib Nassar will be awarded a prize from the Kuwait Foundation for Advancement of Science (KFAS) for his research work on the use of manioc in fighting hunger. The prize was announced in March, but will be delivered in December. Nassar, who holds a degree in Agricultural Engineering from Cairo University, a doctoral degree in Genetics from Alexandria University and a PhD in the same field from the University of Florida, has dedicated his career to genetic manipulation of manioc.

The hybrids created by Nassar in the 1970s were used in research work in West Africa. “They gave rise to varieties planted across over four million hectares, that feed over 40 million people,” Nassar told ANBA. The scientist produced a hybrid manioc variety with double the protein contents of the conventional variety.

The 75-year-old Nassar is an emeritus professor at the University of Brasília (UnB), where he worked for over 30 years. He was born in Assiut, in southern Egypt, and moved to Brazil in 1974, after the two countries signed a bilateral agreement for scientific exchange. “I enjoyed Brazil and stayed here teaching, researching and improving manioc,” he said by email. The invitation to work in Brazil was extended by the local Ministry of External Affairs.

In Egypt, Nassar was a professor at the Cairo University. He hails from an influential political family: his father was a congressman and his uncle led the opposition to then-president Anwar Sadat. “I had every reason to stay in Egypt, but the seductive power of Brazil was stronger,” he said. Nassar was married and already had three daughters. The family moved with him to Brazil, but could not adapt and returned to their country after four years.

As soon as he arrived in Brazil, Nassar went to work at the University of São Paulo (USP), in Piracicaba. Afterwards, he worked as a professor at the Federal University of Goiânia, and in 1980 he moved to Brasília, where he lives until this day. He obtained Brazilian citizenship in 1979 and feels very comfortable in his second home.

“I am glad and happy to have chosen Brazil as my second country. Anti-hunger actions in Brazil are very well designed, and we will win this battle before any other country. We are pioneers, we are capable and we will set an example for everyone else to follow,” he said.

The KFAS prize requires contestants to register. It targets scientists of Arab origin who work around the world. “It was no surprise, I had great expectations. I competed against scientists from the world over, and I always had confidence in my work. I had much hope, because I have always been confident in my work and my academic background,” he said. The scientist will receive US\$ 100,000.

***Translated by Gabriel Pomeranblum**