

2004 World Food  
Prize to  
Dr Monty Jones for  
NERICA  
Development:  
Big Boost to the  
Africa Rice Center



Dr Monty Jones, co-laureate of the 2004 World Food Prize with Mrs Delphine Koudou (Bintu), a progressive woman farmer

In recognition of the immense potential of NERICA for food security and poverty alleviation in sub-Saharan Africa, Dr Monty Jones, popularly called *The Father of NERICA*, was selected as the co-laureate of the 2004 World Food Prize.

Dr Jones, the Executive Secretary of the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA), is the first African to receive this prestigious award. He shares the prize with Professor Yuan Longping from China, whose work was instrumental in achieving the world's first high-yielding hybrid rice varieties.

The World Food Prize, known as the *Nobel Prize for Food and Agriculture*, was created in 1986 by Dr Norman Borlaug, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970 for his work in developing new technologies for feeding the hungry. The World Food Prize honors outstanding individuals who have made vital contributions to improving the quality, quantity, or availability of food throughout the world.

The recognition of Dr Jones has a very special significance for Africa as a whole and for the Africa Rice Center, in particular. NERICA is a technological breakthrough for Africa by an African in an African-led institution—the Africa Rice Center—with strong support from partners across the world.

The research on NERICAs involved national agricultural research programs in many African countries, CGIAR Centers, and advanced research institutions in China, France, Japan, United Kingdom, and the United States.

“By winning this prize, Dr Jones has made us very proud,” Dr Nwanze exclaimed. Thanking the Africa Rice Center, Dr Jones stated, “Indeed, this is a very prestigious award. However, it would not have come without the support and guidance of WARDA management, colleagues and friends.”

It was during Dr Jones' tenure as Head of the Upland Rice Breeding Program and Deputy Director of Research at the Africa Rice Center, 1991-2002, that he achieved the NERICA breakthrough by doing pioneering research, potentially benefiting 20 million rice farmers and 250 million consumers in Africa.

NERICAs combine the toughness of the African rice species with the productivity traits of Asian rice varieties. Using participatory varietal selection (PVS) approach, Dr Jones and his colleagues tapped the knowledge of local farmers in creating NERICAs, specifically, adapting the varieties to suit the harsh growing conditions of upland (rainfed) rice ecologies of Africa, home to 70% of the region's poor rice farmers, mostly women.

The Center has generated several hundred NERICA lines, opening new gene pools and increasing the biodiversity of rice to the world of science. NERICA varieties for other more productive rice ecologies are already being evaluated in farmers' fields.

NERICAs are continuing to make headway in West, Central and eastern Africa. It is estimated that NERICAs are planted on more than 100,000 ha across Africa, including about 60,000 ha in Guinea and more than 10,000 ha in Uganda.

Convinced of NERICA's potential to reduce poverty and increase food security in SSA, many donors and international NGOs are collaborating with African governments to help disseminate NERICA across the region.

The NEPAD Steering Committee has identified NERICA as one of Africa's "best practices worth scaling up" and has endorsed its expansion across the continent. The African Rice Initiative (ARI), hosted by the Africa Rice Center, was launched in March 2002 to serve as a channel for coordinated NERICA dissemination efforts throughout Africa.

NERICA seed are being multiplied in several countries across the continent with assistance from Japan, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Sasakawa-Global (S-G) 2000, and World Vision International, among others.

The African Development Bank (AfDB) announced in 2003 its plan to embark on a project of more than \$30 million to support national programs in the dissemination of NERICA over a 5-year period in seven West African countries.

Receiving high tributes from world leaders at the Tokyo International Conference on Africa's Development (TICAD) III in September 2003, NERICA emerged as a byword for successful Asia-Africa cooperation. The world leaders urged that high priority should be given to NERICA's expansion "to other parts of the continent in urgent need."

"The NERICA success would not have been possible without sustained funding for rice research from members of the CGIAR and the support of African countries," Dr Nwanze said.

"We are especially grateful to the NERICA champions who have played a pivotal role in moving it to farmers' fields, namely the Japanese Government, World Bank, Rockefeller Foundation, UNDP, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), S-G 2000, Gatsby Foundation, and AfDB," he added.

The announcement of the co-winners of the 2004 World Food Prize took place during a U.S. State Department ceremony with U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell; Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman; FAO Director General Jacques Diouf; Nobel Laureate and creator of the World Food Prize Dr Norman E. Borlaug; Chairman of the World Food Prize Foundation John Ruan III; and President of the World Food Prize and former U.S. Ambassador Kenneth Quinn on 29 March 2004.

Mr Ian Johnson, Chairman and Dr Francisco Reifschneider, Director of the CGIAR attended the announcement ceremony. Congratulating Dr Jones and the Africa Rice Center, they said they were very happy to see that the work of the Center was "properly recognized, which signifies a great promise for a better tomorrow."

The World Food Prize was formally presented to Professor Yuan and Dr Jones at a ceremony on 14 October 2004 in the Iowa State Capitol Building, Des Moines. The ceremony was held as part of The World Food Prize International Symposium, *From Asia to Africa: Rice, Biofortification and Enhanced Nutrition*. ❖