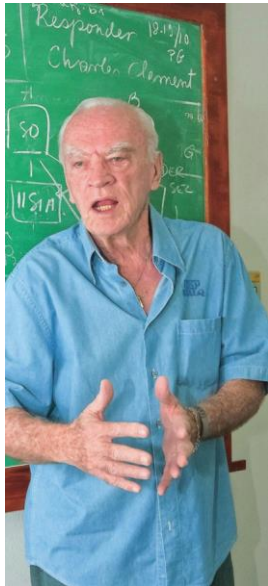




Obituary

Roland Vencovsky (1936-2016)



On July 6, 2016, the eminent geneticist Roland Vencovsky passed away, due to complications while treating for a stomach cancer. Born in São Paulo on June 10, 1936, Dr. Vencovsky was married with Mária Olávia Vencovsky for 53 years and had three sons (Vítor, Norberto and Ronaldo) and two daughters (Cláudia and Cecília). He was always very proud about his family and his grandsons and granddaughters. “I do love to stay with my grandsons and granddaughters; in fact, I have 12!”, was something that he frequently said.

Prof. Roland graduated in Agronomy at Escola Superior de Agricultura Luiz de Queiroz (ESALQ), Universidade de São Paulo (USP), in 1958, and worked as a faculty member of the Departamento de Genética of the same University until he retired in 1996. He acquired a PhD degree in 1960, became Associate Professor in 1970 and Full Professor in 1994. He did his master at North Carolina State University from 1965 to 1967, and was a visiting scholar at the University of Minnesota (1974-1975) and North Carolina State University (1990-1991). Dr. Vencovsky was head of the Centro Nacional de Milho e Sorgo (EMBRAPA) from 1979 to 1984, and was also a visiting scholar at Universidade Federal de Goiás (2000-2003).

Working with Quantitative Genetics and Biometrical Genetics, Dr. Vencovsky is considered one of the few who introduced both subjects in Brazil. He was advisor to over 80 PhD and MSc theses and published more than 170 articles, besides several book chapters. His book “Genética Biométrica no Fitomelhoramento” (co-authored by P. Barriça) is used in several graduate programs in Brazil and South America. He investigated genetic aspects of several crops and natural plant species, including maize, horticultural crops, sugarcane, eucalyptus, and several native plant species. Research topics were very diverse, covering broad subjects, such as plant breeding, population genetics, genetic mapping, mating systems, effective size, and conser-

vation. Dr. Vencovsky worked very hard to disseminate the application of molecular markers in plant genetics studies, presenting his ideas in a number of disciplines, short courses, talks and workshops.

Roland valued a lot his family and friends. He was a humble and very friendly person, and was always pleased to discuss science with faculty, researchers and students. He was a big fan of soccer and liked to listen to games and interviews from radio stations, being aware of scores and line-outs. When young, he worked as a radio speaker under the pseudonym of Luiz Rolando. Roland loved classical music and reading books, especially biographies. Being a very smart person, he was not afraid of revealing when he was not sure about some scientific problem or question from students (which happened very rarely, by the way). This made him famous for leaving students not afraid to make questions and discuss advanced topics. He had a special gift for turning complicated issues into intuitive and easy-to-understand concepts. He had the habit of doing a lot of handwriting even in the computer times, and have a (famous) green-board at his office, where he was frequently writing and making annotations. He used to say that he became a better professor by doing research, and a better scientist by teaching.

The list of his achievements is impressive, being a worldwide recognized geneticist. To just name a few: Vencovsky was a member of the Brazilian Academy of Sciences, the São Paulo Academy of Sciences, and received the very prestigious award “Comendador da Ordem Nacional do Mérito Científico” from the Brazilian Presidency. He was recognized for his contribution to genetics by the Brazilian Society of Genetics (2002) and also by the Brazilian Society of Plant Breeding (2015). In Piracicaba, where he had based his career, there is a classroom named after him at the Departamento de Genética (ESALQ/USP), where students learn methods to analyze genetic data.

Roland Vencovsky was certainly an eminent example of integrity and intellectual dedication to generations of geneticists, that will miss him for years to come.

Antonio Augusto Franco Garcia
Departamento de Genética
Escola Superior de Agricultura “Luiz de Queiroz”
Universidade de São Paulo