

Obituary

Prof. M.S. Swaminathan



1925-2023

The Indian Dairy Association (IDA) is deeply grieved on the demise of Prof. M.S. Swaminathan - founder of the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) on September 28, 2023 in Chennai.

He was an agronomist, eminent agricultural scientist, plant geneticist, administrator, and humanitarian. He has been called the main architect of the Green Revolution in India for his leadership and role in introducing and further developing high-yielding varieties of wheat and rice.

Born in Tamil Nadu's Thanjavur district, he earned a PG Degree in Cytogenetics in 1949 from the IARI, New Delhi. He earned his Doctor of Philosophy Degree from Cambridge. He did post-doctoral research at the University of Wisconsin.

Prof. Swaminathan was named the first World Food Prize laureate for developing and spearheading the introduction of high-yielding wheat and rice varieties into India during the 1960s when that country faced the prospect of widespread famine.

His collaborative scientific efforts with Norman Borlaug, spearheading a mass movement with farmers and other scientists and backed by public policies, saved India and Pakistan from certain famine-like conditions in the 1960s. His leadership as Director General of the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines was instrumental in his being awarded the first World Food Prize in 1987, recognized as one of the highest honours in the field of agriculture. The United Nations Environment Programme has called him "the Father of Economic Ecology".

Prof. Swaminathan worked with late Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi to establish agricultural policies. He chaired numerous prestigious international conferences, including the 1974 United Nations World Food Congress in Rome. He became Director General of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR). In 1979, he was made the Principal Secretary of the Union Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation. In 1980, he was appointed as Member (Agriculture, Rural Development, Science and Education), Planning Commission for a few months.

Prof. Swaminathan established the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) in 1988 as a not-for-profit trust from the proceeds of the First World Food Prize, which he received in 1987.

Some of the prestigious awards and honours received by him were:- Padma Shri - 1967; Ramon Magsaysay Award - 1971; Padma Bhushan - 1972; Padma Vibhushan - 1989; World Food Prize - 1987. Prof. Swaminathan was awarded the first World Agriculture Prize at the 11th Global Agriculture Leadership Summit 2018 in New Delhi wherein he received cash prize of \$1,00,000. The prize money was later used for creating fellowships at MSSRF at the post-graduate level, to convert the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals into field-level accomplishments. It was initiated by Prof. Swaminathan with an aim to help promote linkages between agriculture, nutrition and health, through a 'Farming Systems for Nutrition' programme.

He was nominated to the Parliament of India for one term between 2007 and 2013. During his tenure he put forward a bill for the recognition of women farmers in India.

He is survived by three daughters. One of his daughter – Dr. Soumya Swaminathan, who served as the Chief Scientist at the World Health Organization (WHO) from 2019-2022 took over as Chairperson of his foundation – MSSRF in January 2023.

The Association mourns the death of Prof. M.S. Swaminathan and pray to God to grant heavenly peace to the departed soul and give enough strength to the family members to bear this irreparable loss.