



YAAKOV EPHRAT (MENKES)

Yaakov Ephrat (menkes) was born in Poland in 1912. Studied in public gymnasium in Poland and then traveled to France to study at the agricultural university of Nancy, where in 1930 he earned the degree of 'Ingenieur Agronome'. Emigrated to Israel (Palestine) in 1936 to join Kibbutz Tel Amal (Nir David) where he headed the field and forage crops branch. In the years 1943-1946 Ephrat conducted trials in field crops at the Mandatory Government Experiment station at Acre.

From 1947 to 1949 worked as breeder in "Hazera" seed company, then joined the renown "Mikve Israel" agricultural high school as teacher and head of field crops. Yaakov Ephrat was accepted in 1955 to the Agricultural Research Station (later ARO) as researcher in cereal and legume crops (continuing to teach in "Mikve Israel") and remained there till his retirement.

His main field of research was breeding of winter cereals (wheat, barley, oats), and was promoted to head the field and forage crops department. For his PhD work at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem he studied the ecology of oats (1959).

His achievements in winter cereal research were many: breeding of high yielding soft (spring) wheat varieties, of excellent baking quality and considerable resistance to rust and septoria fungal diseases; also, high yielding 'durum' (hard) wheat varieties. Two of his soft 'spring' wheat varieties, 'Lachish' and 'Miriam', were the main varieties grown in Israel during the 1970s, and achieved international spread as well. Ephrat developed and improved breeding methods for winter cereals, such as the growing of two generations within one year, and the use of mutagenase soaked in chemicals. Dr. Ephrat twice received the "Hazera" prize (1960, 1971) for his work in the breeding of winter cereals; was selected in 1975 as ARO's distinguished lecturer; and at the pinnacle of national recognition, was granted the prestigious 'Israel Prize' for his life-time contribution to Israel's agriculture.



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He retired the same year, and passed away shortly after. Prof. Isaac Arnon, who was director of the Acre Experiment station and later headed the Agricultural Research Station (to become ARO), expressed, in his book, high appreciation for Ephrat's devotion and research skills. In his recommendation for Dr. Ephrat's candidacy for 'Israel Prize' in 1977, Prof. Yoash Vaadia, then head of ARO, wrote: "His achievements in the creation of (new) wheat varieties are the combination of original thinking, clear definition of the problem, and the systematic preparation for its solution".

One year after Dr. Ephrat's demise, at a memorial service, his student and colleague Dr. Baruch Retig said "as head of Field Crops Department he succeeded to build around him an active team and to 'infect' it with the joy of creation". In his opinion, "Ephrat deserves to be said of 'that he served well his nation's agriculture'".