

Aussie TJ Higgins receives GRDC Seed of Light Award

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http://greenbio.checkbiotech.org/news/tj_higgins_receives_grdc_seed_light_award

One of Australia's leading researchers in plant gene technology has been recognised for his advocacy of and commitment to communicating the outcomes of scientific research. Dr TJ Higgins, retiring Deputy Chief of the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation's (CSIRO) Plant Industry Division, has been presented with the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) Seed of Light award.

Dr Higgins received his award from GRDC Southern Regional Panel chair David Shannon at a CSIRO function in Canberra where colleagues and industry personnel gathered to thank and farewell Dr Higgins who has retired after 36 years with the CSIRO. The Seed of Light honour came as a surprise to Dr Higgins who was unaware that he had been nominated for the award, which recognises excellence in grains research and development communications.

Mr Shannon said Dr Higgins had achieved a reputation both in Australia and throughout the international science community based on his research, his public advocacy of science and his science management skills. "Dr Higgins has been a tireless public spokesperson on all matters related to gene technology and GM crops," Mr Shannon said.

"His expertise in this area has built up over many years through his personal involvement in GM programs aimed at improving nutritional quality and insect resistance of legume crops. "In all of this, Dr Higgins has been a model of integrity, aiming to provide the non-scientific community with an accurate appraisal of GM issues free from emotionally-charged arguments advanced by special interest groups in the community."

Mr Shannon said that to help educate the public and de-mystify the science around GM technologies, Dr Higgins had for many years led and presented the Plant Industry Gene Technology for Decision Makers (formerly part of Industry Link) program which involved courses to inform a wide cross-section of the Australian community, including professional groups such as executives from industry, teachers, journalists and bureaucrats.

"There is no doubt that these courses have played a significant part in improving the understanding of GM issues and its value to both producers and consumers in Australia," Mr Shannon said. "Dr Higgins' dedication to the cause of informing the public debate around GM issues has been of enormous significance.

"The principles and practices that he has implemented in his multi-faceted role in the GM debate, that aim to improve agricultural outcomes both in Australia and internationally, provide an ample demonstration of his commitment."

Mr Shannon said Dr Higgins' enthusiasm for science education had also been utilised by the Science Olympiad program which identifies gifted and talented secondary school students who represent Australia in international science competition.