



WORLD FOOD PRIZE FOUNDATION

# 2024 WORLD FOOD PRIZE

*Laureates*



**CARY  
FOWLER**

**GEOFFREY  
HAWTIN**

# Securing the Future of FOOD AND AGRICULTURE



DR. GEOFFREY HAWTIN



DR. CARY FOWLER

**DR. GEOFFREY HAWTIN** and **DR. CARY FOWLER** will receive the 2024 World Food Prize for their extraordinary leadership in preserving and protecting the world's heritage of crop biodiversity and mobilizing this critical resource to defend against threats to global food security. Over the last 50 years, their combined efforts as researchers, policy advisors, thought leaders and advocates have succeeded in engaging governments, scientists, farmers and civil society towards the conservation of over 6,000 species of crops and culturally important plants.

Hawtin and Fowler are highly regarded as the world's foremost experts on global crop biodiversity and genetic resources, which are essential to long-term global food security in the face of climate change and other existential threats. They have been principally involved in the most important innovations in plant genetic resources throughout their careers, especially in operating and funding crop genebanks all over the world. Genebanks are crucial resources for scientists who develop improved varieties of the world's most important food crops. Material held in genebanks contains beneficial traits with the potential to improve crops' climate resilience, disease resistance, nutritional value and tolerance to high salinity, which is increasingly valuable as these preserved varieties are rapidly disappearing from farmers' fields.



"We've since managed to collect and preserve all of the major crops, with around 150,000 types of wheat now in storage."

- Cary Fowler



"The genetic diversity of crops is as important to biodiversity as it is to food security."

- Geoffrey Hawtin



Hawtin began working with the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) in the 1970s, where he led teams in the field in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey to collect local varieties of lentils and legumes. When civil war erupted in Lebanon, he moved irreplaceable collections at great personal risk out of the country over a mined road and under fire.

As Director General, Hawtin transformed the International Plant Genetic Resources Institute (IPGRI – now part of the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT) from a moderate-sized program to an independent, multidimensional CGIAR center. He tripled the budget and led the development of diverse international research programs in areas including conservation of crop wild relatives, forest genetic resources, indigenous knowledge and ethical and policy issues. In 1994, he convinced the CGIAR centers to sign an agreement with the United Nations (UN) Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) placing their germplasm collections in trust for the benefit of all, a move which fostered good faith and cooperation among the CGIAR, nongovernmental organizations and indigenous communities.

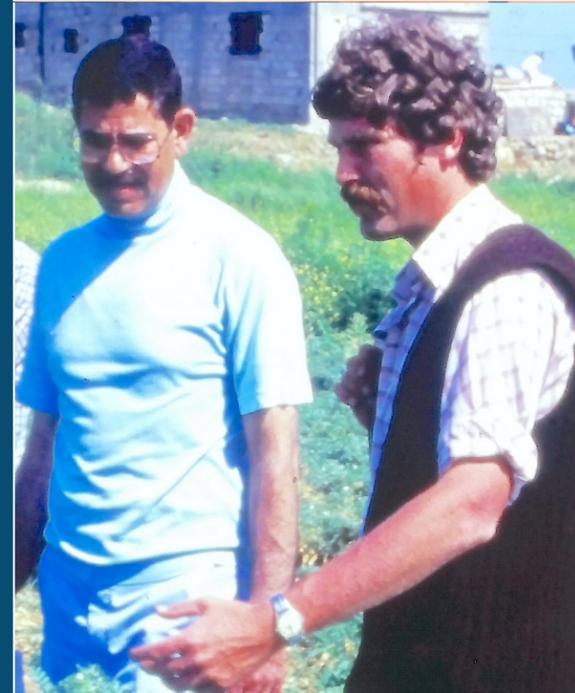
Fowler wrote the first funding proposals for the Livestock Conservancy and for Seed Savers Exchange in Decorah, Iowa, while he was Program Director at the National Sharecroppers Fund. Later, as Head of the Secretariat of FAO's International Conference and Program for Plant Genetic Resources, he prepared the UN's first assessment of the world's plant genetic resources. He also led the research, drafting and participatory negotiation process that culminated in 150 countries adopting a Global Plan of Action for conserving and using these resources for agriculture.



“  
**WE ARE TRYING TO  
 TEACH THE WORLD TO SAVE ITSELF.  
 WE ARE IN A  
 RACE AGAINST TIME.**  
 ”

While serving as Director General and Senior Advisor, respectively, at IPGRI in the 1990s, Hawtin and Fowler represented CGIAR in the years-long UN negotiations around the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (Plant Treaty). Their technical and policy input to the Plant Treaty resulted in formalizing the diversity of 64 food and forage crops housed in genebanks as international public goods. This effort ensured the protection of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture and facilitated the movement of these resources to those who need them.

The Plant Treaty recognized the importance of a stable source of funding as an essential element for the protection of these collections. To meet this need, Hawtin founded the Global Crop Diversity Trust (Crop Trust), raising tens of millions of dollars for an endowment that now provides funding for genebanks the world over as well as projects aimed at conserving crop diversity. When Fowler took over leadership of the Crop Trust from Hawtin in 2005, he further expanded funding and broadened its mission with projects aimed at rescuing at-risk repositories and collecting crop wild relatives.



“Early in their careers, Drs. Hawtin and Fowler realized the immense value and heritage of our crop genetic resources and dedicated their professional life to its safeguarding to secure the future of food and agriculture for the next hundred years and more. In choosing these two visionaries, the Selection Committee recognized the importance of this long-term thinking and planning for facing climate change and other existential threats, and for the example it sets and the wisdom it imparts in all of us on how we may collectively mobilize the equitable use of the rest of our global endowments to ensure food security for all.”

-Dr. Gebisa Ejeta  
Chair, Laureate Selection Committee  
2009 World Food Prize Laureate



Both Fowler and Hawtin were instrumental in establishing the highly acclaimed Svalbard Global Seed Vault in Norway, built for the purpose of serving as the world’s long-term safe backup repository for crop diversity. Fowler chaired the Norwegian government’s committee, of which Hawtin was also a member, that collectively assessed the feasibility of the proposed Vault. Fowler continued to lead the negotiations for opening the Vault, helping to break through deadlocks in international politics. He served nine years as the Chair of the Vault’s International Advisory Council. Meanwhile, Hawtin developed technical, management and policy specifications for the Vault which were used by the Norwegian government in its construction and operation.

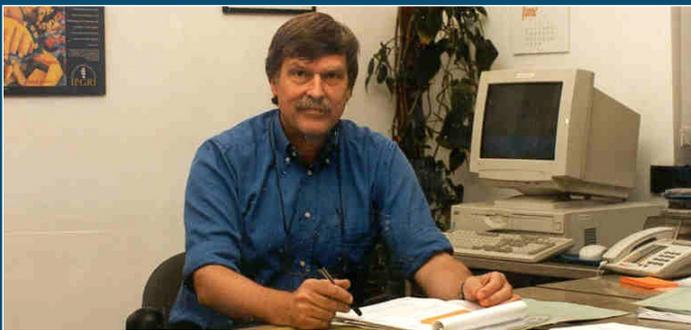
In its 15 years of operation, the Vault now safeguards 1.25 million accessions of crops, their wild relatives and other culturally important plants from over 6,000 species from nearly every country in the world. This collection represents the world’s largest and most diverse library of crop biodiversity. Deposits at the Vault have been made by more than 100 institutions, civil society organizations and indigenous communities.

It has already proven its value by preserving backups of the ICARDA genebank, which were crucial in rebuilding the collection after it was destroyed in the Syrian civil war. The restored samples even included seeds collected by Hawtin and his team decades before.

# From Seeds to Security

## SAFEGUARDING TOMORROW'S HARVEST

OVER 1,700 GLOBAL GENEbanks PRESERVE THE RESOURCES THE WORLD NEEDS TO SECURE THE FUTURE OF FOOD



The Svalbard Global Seed Vault is a crowning achievement in the careers of Fowler and Hawtin, as it was made possible by decades of their contributions to crop biodiversity conservation and mobilization. Indeed, the Vault would never have opened without their contributions to the Plant Treaty and the Crop Trust, under which the Vault is able to operate internationally.

As a member of the Executive Board of the Crop Trust, Hawtin continues the mission of the organization he started - to conserve crop diversity and make it available for all to use, forever. In Fowler's current position as U.S. Special Envoy for Global Food Security, he launched and leads the initiative for a Vision for Adapted Crops and Soils, focusing on the diversity of nutritious, climate-adapted, traditional crops for improved food and nutrition security.

**More than anyone else, Hawtin and Fowler have together shaped the global system we now have for protecting, sharing and utilizing crop biodiversity for the benefit of humanity.**