

U of A honored for research that could help 30 million Brazilians

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The University of Alberta now has a permanent connection to the agricultural life of millions of people in a vast region of Brazil. A newly discovered fungus that helps plants grow in dry soil has been named in honour of the U of A for its help with the research.

The [fungus](#), now known as *Complexipora albertae*, spreads out under the soil and feeds additional moisture and nutrients to the roots of nearby plants. Researchers want to put the fungus to work as an agricultural tool to increase food production in a huge, impoverished and uncharacteristically dry area of Brazil.

The area is classified as dry tropical forest. It's as vast as Canada's three prairie provinces, and supports 30 million people on a near subsistence level of agriculture.

Ricardo Berbara, a professor of agronomy at the University of Rio de Janeiro, named the fungus after the U of A to acknowledge its assistance in the research. The university has had a presence in Brazil's tropical dry forest since 2005. Earth and atmospheric sciences researcher Arturo Sanchez-Azofeifa directs a remote-sensing environmental research program in the area.

Berbara and Sanchez-Azofeifa are hopeful that the plant-friendly nature of the fungus can aid native agricultural plants like cassava, a tuber that is a staple of the diet for the millions of people living in the tropical dry region.

The research team will also determine if other closely related species of the fungus might be used to enhance the growth of the other plants in a wide range of extreme climates.

Geraldo Wilson Fernandes, a member of the Brazilian research team, will present a framed photo of *Complexipora albertae* to Lorne Babiuk, U of A's vice president, research. The presentation will be made Tuesday, July 14 at University Hall on the north campus.

Source: University of Alberta ([news](#) : [web](#))

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