

China's Yuan Longping dies; rice research helped feed world

May 23 2021, by Huizhong Wu



In this Oct. 15, 2017 photo, Yuan Longping, center, stands in a field of hybrid rice in Handan in northern China's Hebei Province. Yuan, a scientist who developed higher-yield varieties of rice that helped feed people around the world, died Saturday May 22, 2021, at a hospital in the city of Changsha, Xinhua News agency reported. Credit: Chinatopix via AP

Yuan Longping, a Chinese scientist who developed higher-yield rice varieties that helped feed people around the world, died Saturday at a hospital in the southern city of Changsha, the Xinhua News agency reported. He was 90.

Yuan spent his life researching [rice](#) and was a household name in China, known by the nickname "Father of Hybrid Rice." Worldwide, a fifth of all rice now comes from species created by hybrid rice following Yuan's breakthrough discoveries, according to the website of the World Food Prize, which he won in 2004.

On Saturday afternoon, large crowds honored the scientist by marching past the hospital in Hunan province where he died, local media reported, calling out phrases such as: "Grandpa Yuan, have a good journey!"

It was in the 1970s when Yuan achieved the breakthroughs that would make him a household name. He developed a hybrid strain of rice that recorded an annual yield 20% higher than existing varieties—meaning it could feed an extra 70 million people a year, according to Xinhua.

His work helped transform China from "food deficiency to food security" within three decades, according to the World Food Prize, which was created by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Norman Borlaug in 1986 to recognize scientists and others who have improved the quality and availability of food.

Yuan and his team worked with dozens of countries around the world to address issues of [food security](#) as well as malnutrition.

Even in his later years, Yuan did not stop doing research. In 2017, working with a Hunan agricultural school, he helped create a strain of low-cadmium indica rice for areas suffering from heavy metal pollution, reducing the amount of cadmium in rice by more than 90%.

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