

Patrick VINCOURT

Patrick Vincourt started his research career at INRA on maize breeding methodologies, before taking over the direction of the sunflower team at Montpellier, after the retirement of Georges Piquemal in 1983. From the start, he was very active in the use of genetic resources to enlarge the variability of cultivated sunflower available to breeders. He worked both on wild species (in collaboration with H.Serieys) and cultivated resources, mainly the old open pollinated varieties. He developed the programme Protournesol, with Felicity Vear (INRA, Clermont-Ferrand) and all the breeding firms (about 20) who had recently started programmes in France. He also encouraged the first uses of markers (isoenzymes) to compare material from different origins.

In 1988, he joined Rustica Semences as assistant director, becoming director in 1993 (of Rustica then successively Rustica-Prograin, and Euralis semences), before becoming chairman of Soltis, the research company for both Euralis and Limagrain. In this period, he managed breeding of many very successful sunflower varieties, for example Albena^{RM} and Allstar^{RM}. He initiated and encouraged research, in particular with the biotech sister company Biogemma, using in vitro culture and molecular methodologies. He was coordinator of the public-private research collaboration programme "Genoplante", both for sunflower and rapeseed, which was one of the first introductions of large scale genotyping into sunflower breeding programmes.

In 2006, P.Vincourt rejoined INRA to start the new team and programme on sunflower genetics and genomics at Toulouse (concerning interactions with both biotic and abiotic factors). Starting from nothing, in 9 years he developed a team who are now on the forefront of sunflower genomics, sequencing and bioinformatics, as well as sunflower physiology related to drought resistance and to certain diseases such as downy mildew, broomrape and Phoma black stem. From the start, he organized collaboration programmes between INRA, Terres-Inovia (ex CETIOM) and breeding companies, in addition to more academic programmes, in particular the international sunflower genome initiative, led by Laurent Reiseberg. Validation of the importance of the new team at Toulouse came with the nationally supported "Investissements d'Avenir" programme "Sunrise" in 2012 (which will continue to 2018). This is a very large programme combining genomics, phenotyping and development of resources with the objective of providing methodologies to improve yield, under stress conditions and climate change, in collaboration with most of the French breeding companies.

Since his return to INRA, Patrick Vincourt has directed many master and doctoral students, and caught up on scientific publications which were not the activity of a breeding company director. Throughout his career, he initiated new aspects of sunflower research and gave an important effort to the availability of results and their use for the benefit of the sunflower crop. In recent years, he developed the internet sites : Wiki LIPM-HELIANTHUS et HELIAGENE.

Patrick Vincourt retired in July 2014 but continues to be active in expertise and collaboration with his colleagues on programmes which he initiated.