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Dr. Charles Steger, President
Virginia Tech
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061-0131

16 March 2009

Dear President Steger,

I am happy to learn you are planning to nominate Dr. S.K. De Datta for the World Food Prize. I support the nomination wholeheartedly.

I have known Dr. De Datta for the last 39 years. We were colleagues at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) for 25 years and we worked closely in rice varietal improvement programs. Plant breeders developed the breeding lines and Dr. De Datta, as IRRI agronomist, evaluated the elite breeding lines for many important agronomic traits such as yield, drought and flood tolerance, nitrogen use efficiency, protein content and adaptability to adverse growing conditions. For example, he was the first to identify the superior yield potential of the breeding line IR8-288-3, which later was named IR8. Similarly, IR42 and IR58 were identified for higher nitrogen use efficiency. IR442 lines for drought and flood tolerance and IR480-5-9-3 for high protein content. Dr. De Datta also developed screening techniques for evaluating germplasm for drought tolerance. The technique is used widely by rice breeders for screening segregating populations for drought tolerance. Rice breeding at IRRI is a team effort and Dr. De Datta was always a very active team member during his tenure at IRRI. The impact of IRRI's breeding program in achieving food security in Asia, where 92% of the world's rice is grown, is well known and Dr. De Datta shares much credit for this achievement.

Dr. De Datta is the author of a widely used book on rice entitled "Principles and Practices of Rice Production" and author or coauthor of 350 research papers published in refereed journals. Dr. De Datta took keen interest in training young scientists from national rice improvement programs and served as the supervisor of 77 M.Sc. and Ph.D. students. Many of his former students are holding positions of leadership in rice growing countries. He visited the national programs regularly to observe rice growing programs and advise the local scientists. Thus he contributed to food security in Asia through helping identify superior germplasm, by developing management practices and through dissemination of research results and training of scientists from rice growing countries.

For the last 17 years, Dr. De Datta has served as the Director of International Programs at Virginia Tech, Blacksburg. He has spearheaded the collaborative research, education, and outreach activities in Asia, Africa, Latin America, Caribbean, Eastern Europe including Russia and Ukraine.