



April 2020

Roll with the Virtual and Keep Your WITs About You

The BGRI's collective hat is off to the medical and essential personnel who are on the frontlines of this battle with COVID-19. There are striking parallels between wheat rust and global human epidemics, as Dave Hodson points out in his podcast for Plantopia, "The Arms Race Part 1: Ug99." It's certainly worth a listen. And worth considering the importance of the global wheat community's efforts in breeding and introducing rust resistant varieties ahead of the evolving races of rust.

This month, the BGRI announces our 2020 Jeanie Borlaug Laube Women in Triticum Early Career awardees: **Anna Elizabeth Backhaus**, from Germany; **Bharati Pandey**, from India; **Yewubdar Ishetu Shewaye**, from Ethiopia; **Paula Silva**, from Uruguay; and **Peipei Zhang**, from China. **Evans Lagudah**, from Australia, is the winner of the Mentor Award. Read more about them below and on the globalrust.org website. A big congratulations to you all!

We are celebrating the WIT winners on May 21 in an interactive webinar on Zoom, when the BGRI hosts the first in what we hope is a series of Virtual Workshops. Log in to join Jeanie Borlaug, Barbara Stinson, Maricelis Acevedo, Sarah Davidson Evanega, the new WITs, and a panel of previous WIT winners for an hour-long interactive webinar on Zoom. Details are below. We look forward to seeing so many of you virtually!

Be safe, be well, be hopeful,
Ronnie Coffman and the BGRI Team

Meet the 2020 WIT Early Career and Mentor Awardees

2020 Women in Triticum Award Winners



Bharati Pandey

Early Career Award Winner, India



Anna Backhaus

Early Career Award Winner, UK



Paula Silva

Early Career Award Winner, Uruguay



Yewubdar Shewaye

Early Career Award Winner, Ethiopia



Peipei Zhang

Early Career Award Winner, China



Evans Lagudah

Mentor Award Winner, Australia



The Jeanie Borlaug-Laube Women in Triticum Awards celebrate the achievements of women working in wheat and dedicated mentors who fight for gender equality in science.

The BGRI and the Delivering Genetic Gain in Wheat (DGGW) project are excited to announce the 2020 Jeanie Borlaug Laube Women in Triticum (WIT) awardees.

The five WIT Early Career Awardees are:

- Anna Elizabeth Backhaus, from Germany, currently at the John Innes Centre
- Bharati Pandey, from India, currently at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre in Mumbai
- Yewubdar Ishetu Shewaye, from Ethiopia, currently at EIAR
- Paula Silva, from Uruguay, currently at Kansas State University
- Peipei Zhang, from China, currently at Hebei Agricultural University

And the 2020 WIT Mentor is being awarded to Evans Lagudah, with CSIRO, in Australia.

"The future of wheat science depends on innovative, enthusiastic researchers," said Maricelis Acevedo, director for science of the DGGW. "We are thrilled to honor these incredible scientists with a WIT award and continue the tradition of recognizing the next generation of top-notch scientists and the people who mentor them."

The WIT Early Career Award, first awarded in 2010, provides early career women working in wheat with the opportunity for additional training, mentorship, and leadership advancement. The WIT Mentor Award, first awarded in 2011, recognizes the efforts of men and women who have played a significant role in shaping the careers of women working in wheat and demonstrated a commitment to increasing gender parity in agriculture.

[Read more about the WIT awardees here](#)

2020 BGRI WIT Early Career & Mentor Celebration! May 21!

2020 Women in Triticum Award Celebration Virtual Keynote and Panel - Thursday May 21, 2020, 10 AM EST



Register for the Zoom webinar at Globalrust.org
or watch live on Facebook at Facebook.com/globalrust



Keynote: *Gender and Global Food Security*
Barbara Stinson
President
World Food Prize Foundation

Panel Discussion with former WIT Award Winners
The Future of Wheat Research: Aspirations and Visions



Moderator: Hale Tufan
Cornell University
USA



Sarah Battenfield
Syngenta
USA



Mercy Wamalwa
Egerton University
Kenya



Sarrah Ben M'Barek-Ben Romdhane
Regional Field Crops Research Center of Béja
Tunisia



Sandra Duncel
KWS Group
UK



Visit globalrust.org and subscribe to our newsletter
to learn more about upcoming virtual events.

On Thursday, May 21, at 10 am, the BGRI will celebrate the 2020 Women in Triticum Early Career and Mentor awardees in the BGRI's first virtual online workshop.

Jeanie Borlaug Laube and Maricelis Acevedo will host the hour-long interactive zoom webinar on "The Changing Face of Leadership and Research in Wheat." During that time, they will introduce all the 2020 WITs with short videos about each winner.

World Food Prize president Barbara Stinson will deliver a keynote address on "The Importance of Gender in Assuring Global Food Security," and Sarah Davidson Evanega will talk about "The History of the BGRI WIT Award."

Hale Ann Tufan, a 2010 WIT and the 2019 Norman E. Borlaug Field Research and Application awardee, will moderate an interactive panel discussion with four former WIT winners as they discuss "The Future of Wheat Research: Aspirations and Visions."

[Read more about the event here.](#)

[RSVP here to receive webinar links and notifications prior to the event.](#)

[And please let us know if you plan to attend on Facebook!](#)

"The Arms Race Part I: Ug99": Featuring Dave Hodson



Surveillance expert and principal CIMMYT scientist Dave Hodson was invited to do a podcast on "Plantopia," a new series focused on plant diseases from Cornell plant pathologist David Gadoury and the American Phytopathological Society. In the 32-minute podcast, "The Arms Race Part 1: Ug99," Hodson covers much about wheat and Ug99 in terms of the striking parallels between wheat rust and global human epidemics.

[Listen to the Plantopia Podcast with Dave Hodson here.](#)

New PBS Documentary about Norman Borlaug



A new documentary about Norman Borlaug, "The Man Who Tried to Feed the World," was released in April as part of the PBS documentary series "American Experience." Although the documentary was a balanced piece, sometimes revisionist history sets in unfairly. As Ronnie Coffman said, "It's far too easy to criticize Borlaug while offering no solutions. People who criticize him should be forced to identify an ethical alternative to what he did." Justin Cremer at the Cornell Alliance for Science wrote an excellent companion piece for the documentary,

asking why.

[See "The Man Who Tried to Feed the World" here.](#)

[Read Justin Cremer's opinion piece here.](#)

Working Before the Time of COVID-19



Just before travel in Ethiopia was shut down due to COVID-19 in mid-March, Dr. Bedada Girma (right) hit the road with videographer Kumerra Gemuchu (left), visiting farmers for interviews, including Makida Mohammed's village near Asella. They travelled with Makida's oldest son, Tamam (center). The BGRI has received footage and interviews with wheat farmers in Ethiopia and Bangladesh for an upcoming farmer panel. It's good to see you all!

Working During the Time of COVID-19



Filippo Bassi, in a selfie from the durum fields of ICARDA.



Shoula About Kharouf in Syria.



Gurjeet Mann, harvesting wheat at his farm in India, in April, under a clear sky compared to the middle photo, which shows the pollution - without lockdown - last year.

News

A Wandering Botanist: Barberries and Wheat.

By Kathy Keeler, 8 March 2020. With great barberry photos, including one from WIT awardee Shoula About Kharouf.

Wheat Virus is Bigger Problem in Pacific Northwest Than Previously Thought. Growing America, 13 March 2020.

COVID-19 virus spread prompts food insecurity fears in Africa

By Joseph Opoku Gakpo, Cornell Alliance for Science, 26 March 2020.

Launch of Plantopia.

New weekly podcast from the American Phytopathological Society, about plants and

diseases, launched April 9.

Locusts and coronavirus: A Biblical nightmare strikes the horn of Africa

By Emily Pontecarvo for Grist, 13 April 2020.

Recent Publications

History of the Rust Lab in Winnipeg Canada,

Thorvaldur Johnson The Dominion Rust Research Laboratory, 1925-1957.

Events

SAVE THE DATE: 2020 BGRI WIT Early Career and Mentor Celebration

May 21, 2020, 10-11 am (NY time)

Meet the 2020 Women in Triticum and Mentor honorees, w/keynote by Barbara Stinson, and panel discussion w/former WITs.

Computer Vision for Agriculture

April 26, 2020, 13:30 UTC, Dave Hodson gave a keynote talk on wheat rust early warning systems in Ethiopia. You can watch it on the CV4 website.

Contribute to the BGRI newsletter and social media

If you have any news of interest to the BGRI community, please send us a message and we will try to include it in subsequent BGRI newsletters! We also publish and share stories on our [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) accounts. Use [@globalrust](#) to tag any contributions.

Events, career and educational opportunities, photos, and new publications are especially welcome.

Contact BGRI newsletter editor [Linda McCandless](#) or [the BGRI](#).

VISIT OUR WEBSITE

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The Borlaug Global Rust Initiative is supported through the Delivering Genetic Gain in Wheat (DGGW) project at International Programs at the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell University. DGGW is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and UK aid from the UK government.



