
In Memoriam - Prof. Dr. Ivan Atanasov Petkov

20 February 1931 – 06 November 2019



Professor Atanasov was a well renowned soil scientist with broad knowledge and grasp of broader agricultural and natural sciences.

Born in Bejanovo, Bulgaria in 1931, Professor Atanasov entered academia in 1950 as an undergraduate at the High Agricultural Institute in Sofia. He graduated in 1955 with distinction and spent the next four years as a practicing agronomist in the agricultural cooperative of his native village, Bejanovo.

In 1959 he returned back to the High Agricultural Institute, Sofia as an assistant professor in the faculty of Agronomy. In 1965 he was awarded the title of “Candidate of biological sciences” from

the Lomonosov Moscow State University for his thesis (1962 – 1965) “*Composition and properties of the mechanical fractions of Typical Chernozem soils*

from the region of Kursk” conducted under the supervision of Professor N.A. Kachinski in the department of Soil Physics and Amelioration.

Upon his return from Russia he continued to work in the High Agricultural Institute, Sofia and in 1972 he became a Docent (associated professor) in the department of Soil Sciences. In 1977 he was awarded “Doctor of agricultural sciences” for his work on “*Erosion and evolution of the mineral fraction of the Bulgarian soils*”. He was the Dean of the faculty of Agronomy in the years 1976 - 1979.

In 1980 he took the seat of Professor in the department of Soil Sciences of the High Agricultural Institute in Plovdiv, Bulgaria.

In the years 1986-1990 he was the general director of the Centre for Applied Sciences and Information to the Ministry of Environment where he was responsible for environmental monitoring and the development of environmental quality standards. In 1990 he returned to the Agricultural University in Plovdiv and worked there until his retirement in 1999. In this period he held positions as head of department for Tropical Agriculture, and head of the department of Soil Sciences. He was also the Dean of the Swiss-Bulgarian faculty of organic agriculture.

Following his interests in environmental matters and sustainability, he established the non-for-profit Foundation Institute for Sustainable Development and remained its president and general manager until 2011.

Over his long and productive career he was the scientific supervisor of 19 PhD students and of more than 100 bachelor and master students. He authored over 200 scientific publications, monographs and textbooks. He led more than 30 national and international research projects in the area of soil sciences and acted as the editor of many conferences' proceeding from international soil conferences.

His principal areas of interest in the area of soil sciences were (1) change of the mechanical chemical and mineral content of soils due to erosion and soil formation; (2) change and balance of the chemical soil content due to intensive agriculture, (3) development of standards for soil contamination and soil protection.

Substantial part of his scientific work in the later professional years and after his official retirement was dedicated to the creation of legislation for soil protection and to establishing national standards for measurement of soil quality and soil pollution.

He was a member of the editorial board of the Bulgarian Journal of Agricultural Science (1994 – 2006). Between 1986 – 1988 he was a member of the managing board of the INFOTERRA network, a complement of UN Environmental Programme's Earthwatch Programme which plays an important part in fulfilling UNEP's global mandate of monitoring, assessment and dissemination of information on the environment, catalyzing and spurring others to action at international, regional and national levels.

Throughout his career Professor Atanasov's contributions to the agricultural sciences have been recognized with numerous awards, medals and honours: Golden medal from the Ministry of Environment of Bulgaria (1988), 1300 Years Bulgaria medal (1981) and the Cyril and Methodius order. He was member of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and Arts, member of the International Union of Soil Scientists and member of the Bulgarian Soil Society.

His work provided him also with many opportunities to travel across the world as part of different projects or for conferences and international meetings.

He was a firm believer in sharing his knowledge and inspiring the next generation of scientists and above all providing encouragement and guidance to many young scientists. Many of them will remember him as a true role model and mentor, but also someone who was always ready to share his experience and debate opinions, in a considerate and supportive tone, with the occasional well placed joke to liven up the spirits.

His long career in science was an excellent one, with many applied contributions and pioneering work in the area of agricultural sciences. He pioneered work on sustainable development in Bulgaria long before this became the urgent challenge of our current generations.

Professor Atanasov made a difference and leaves a legacy that will continue to shape the views and professional careers of those he thought and who worked with him over the years.