



Dr. Parthiba Balasubramanian examines a field of dry beans.

INDUSTRY AWARD

Dry bean breeder honoured with 12th annual Innovator Award

Alberta Pulse Growers (APG) selected Dr. Parthiba Balasubramanian, who continues to develop dry bean cultivars with useful traits for farmers, as the winner of the 12th annual Alberta Pulse Industry Innovator Award.

"Each year, APG recognizes a person or organization whose progressive thinking and tireless efforts helped build Alberta's pulse industry into the flourishing sector that it is today," said APG Chair Will Muller. "Parthiba has been responsible for developing many dry bean cultivars with traits appreciated by growers in southern Alberta, including myself."

Alberta pulse farmers and distinguished guests were on hand to celebrate Balasubramanian and his achievements at an award lunch during APG Joint Director-Advisor meetings in Calgary earlier this year.

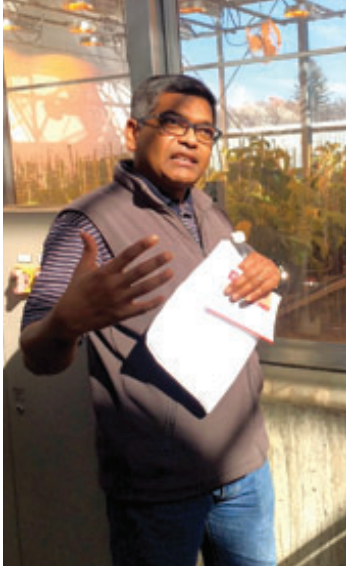
Farmers recognize Balasubramanian's research contributions that have demonstrated success and advanced the

growth of pulses in their businesses. The strength, consistency and performance of the dry bean cultivars developed by his program regularly provided, and continue to provide, excellent returns to the farm gate.

"Parthiba's traditional scientific breeding techniques and strong attention to traits combine high yield with early maturity, lodging resistance, and enhanced resistance to white mould and bacterial diseases," Muller explained.

"This is in addition to improved seed quality such as size, shape, colour and colour retention traits for commercial production under irrigated conditions in Alberta and Saskatchewan which are held in high regard by pulse farmers."

Balasubramanian was nominated for the award by APG's Zone 1, which is comprised of pulse farmers in the southern Alberta region with the climate to grow dry beans. Fellow scientists celebrated Balasubramanian's accomplishments



FAR LEFT: Dr. Balasubramanian hosts a tour of his lab at AAFC.

LEFT: (Left to right) Past Innovator Award Winner Blair Roth, APG Chair Will Muller and APG Director-at-Large (Bean) John Kolk congratulate Dr. Balasubramanian (second from right) following the Innovator Award presentation.

in a video that was shown during the ceremony and is available on the APG YouTube channel at bit.ly/3UjpRb4.

"I am truly humbled to receive this award," said Balasubramanian, who is based at the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) Lethbridge Research and Development Centre. "I accept this award on behalf of the team members who have been part of the dry bean breeding program in Lethbridge in the past and in the present. It is their hard work, dedication and work ethic that has made the accomplishments of the program possible. We have been very fortunate to receive funding from various organizations, and it is because of the funding that we have been able to do the things we do in the breeding program."

Balasubramanian earned a Bachelor of Science (Agriculture) at Annamalai University in India prior to arriving in Canada in 1995 to pursue graduate studies at the University of Saskatchewan. He received the University of Saskatchewan Graduate Scholarship, which made it possible for him to pursue his Master of Science at the Department of Crop Science and Plant Ecology. He earned a PhD in 2002 from the Department of Plant Sciences at the University of Saskatchewan.

After completing his PhD, Balasubramanian worked as a post-doctoral fellow for a year in the pulse crop breeding program. He was then hired as a research scientist (dry bean breeder) at AAFC Morden, MB, in September 2003. Upon the retirement of Dr. Hans-Henning Muendel, who was also a recipient of the APG Innovator Award, Balasubramanian transferred to AAFC Lethbridge as a research scientist (dry bean breeder) in July 2007.

Since then, he has been leading the dry bean breeding program at AAFC Lethbridge.

Balasubramanian's passion for pulses has been evident throughout his career.

"I indicated in my graduate studies application to the University of Saskatchewan that I am interested in research projects involving pulse crop breeding," he recalled. "I was offered the opportunity to do research on dry bean quality as part of my M.Sc. thesis. That started my involvement with dry bean. The research project for my PhD thesis was also on dry bean."

Dry beans have come a long way since that time, and Balasubramanian has been an integral part of that progress.

"Early maturing dry bean cultivars (95 days to maturity) with high yield potential have influenced irrigated crop rotation in southern Alberta," he explained. "Early maturity has enabled some growers to follow dry bean (a low residue crop) with winter wheat (to prevent soil erosion). As in the past, growers continue to experiment with new practices to identify practices that will work best on their farm — a recent example is strip tillage in dry bean. The objective of the dry bean breeding program is always to deliver the best genetics possible to the growers so they may realize the full yield potential on their farm under diverse agronomic practices."

He said that a highlight of his time as a bean breeder has been the extent to which the industry and growers have

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recognized the value of the dry bean breeding program at AAFC Lethbridge and trust the cultivars from the program by growing them on their farm.

When asked which of his accomplishments is most significant, Balasubramanian said it is yet to come!

"I realize the dry bean cultivars from the breeding program have had an impact on the industry and growers," he noted. "However, I would like to develop dry bean cultivars that combine all six traits – early maturity, high yield, lodging resistance, seed quality, resistance to common bacterial blight and partial physiological resistance to white mould. Dry bean cultivars that combine all six of the above traits will have a greater impact on the industry and growers (productivity and economic prosperity), and the environment (reduced use of crop protectants) compared to the current cultivars. The dry bean research team and collaborators at AAFC Lethbridge with funding from various organizations including AAFC, growers and Bunge are working very hard to achieve this objective."

Balasubramanian sees a bright future for the dry bean industry in Alberta.

"At the grower and industry meetings, I see everyone including growers, buyers, exporters, researchers, as well as organizations such as Alberta Pulse Growers and Pulse Canada, working together for the overall benefit of the pulse industry in Alberta," he said. "As long as all pillars of the pulse industry (crop research being one of the pillars) are being listened to and work together, the future remains promising."

Alberta Pulse Growers celebrated its 25th year as a commission by launching the Alberta Pulse Industry Innovator Award and presenting the organization's founding president, Lud Prudek, with the first annual award in 2015. Since that time, the award has been presented to acclaimed pulse researcher Ken Lopetinsky, life-long pulse supporter Blair Roth, Dr. Hans-Henning Muendel who developed numerous bean cultivars, Kirsty Ross (Piquette) who was instrumental in building the field pea industry in northeastern Alberta, Mark Olson who explored new pulse varieties and production methods in many roles including as Alberta Agriculture's Unit Head for Pulse Crops, APG's first vice-president Craig Shaw, and posthumously to seed grower Cliff Cyre. In 2023 former Pulse Canada CEO Gordon Bacon received the honour, in 2024 pea breeder Dr. DJ Bing was named the winner, and in 2025 the honour went to pulse disease expert Dr. Syama Chatterton. 🌱



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INDUSTRY INNOVATOR AWARD

Entry Deadline: Dec. 11, 2026

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