



FRANCO LAMBERTI
1937-2004

It is a deep sadness to realize that Prof. Franco Lamberti, the founder and editor for 31 years of this journal, the founder and director for 29 years of the former Istituto di Nematologia Agraria of Bari, Italy, now the Bari section of the Istituto per la Protezione delle Piante, passed away last August.

Franco Lamberti was born in Merano, Italy, on 16 June, 1937, where he spent his boyhood. Unfortunately, when he was just 16, his father, who was municipality secretary in the region, died and his family had to return to their home city, Bari. Being the eldest of six brothers, although still so young, Franco Lamberti had to take the responsibility of helping his mother in the management of the family. After having obtained the General Certificate of Education, Lamberti was encouraged to undertake agricultural studies and graduated in Agricultural Sciences at the University of Bari in 1961, having presented a thesis in Plant Pathology. Soon he became both bewitched and captivated by study and research in plant pathology. His first steps in research were at the Plant Pathology Institute, of the same University, under the guidance of its director, Prof. Antonio Ciccarone, who had participated at the First International Nematology Course, held in 1951 by Dr. T. Goodey at Rothamsted Experimental Station. Lamberti started his research career on diseases of grape because this crop was very important in the region, and Prof. Ciccarone, who was convinced of the importance of nematodes in plant disease complexes, including virus transmission so clearly demonstrated a few years before (1957) in Davis, California, encouraged Lamberti to undertake nematology studies. Subsequently, Lamberti, who meanwhile had married Teresa and become father of his daughter Carlotta, moved with the family to California in 1965 to specialize in Plant Pathology and Nematology. In California, Lamberti spent one year in Davis and two years in Riverside, where he obtained a MS degree. The stay in California, besides being scientifically fruitful, was made even more special by the birth of his son Lamberto.

Lamberti then returned to Italy full of enthusiasm and with many ideas to develop. He found a very favourable situation because, at that time, the National Research Council of Italy (Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, CNR) was planning an increase of its research laboratories and Lamberti was asked to propose research lines that could form the base of a new small research centre. The research lines proposed by Lamberti were considered so important that they were felt to warrant the foundation of an independent laboratory. In 1970, the "Laboratorio (later Istituto) di Nematologia Agraria Applicata ai Vegetali" was founded and Lamberti was appointed Director. He maintained this duty until June 1999. In addition to this important position, he obtained the "Libera Docenza" at the Plant Pathology Institute of the University of Bari in 1971.

As director of the newly founded laboratory, Lamberti took on the difficult task of founding plant nematology research in Italy. It was necessary to train graduates to become nematologists, to focus on the nematode problems affecting plant crops in Italy, to undertake an efficacious and ambitious research programme to provide sound solutions to the problems that were observed, to divulge the findings of the research such that they would reach potential users, and also to make the international scientific community aware of this new Italian research institution. Therefore, he promoted a wide range of plant nematology research lines, but concentrated personally on Longidorid nematodes, including their systematics with molecular approach, role in the transmission of plant viruses and control of these and many other plant parasitic nematodes, thus becoming an international leader in this field. Lamberti was a tireless and enthusiastic scientist who transmitted these values to his young researchers, who,

through the encouragement they received, maintained a high scientific level and an excellent international reputation for the institute. At its foundation, the Institute had to rely on few persons but, thanks to the encouragement of Lamberti, it soon became crowded with students preparing their theses for graduation and young technicians and graduates who had accepted fellowships to train in nematology. Many of them later obtained positions in the Institute and have gained international reputations. Under Lamberti's leadership, it can be recorded that the Institute's achievements went well beyond even the great expectations with which it set out.

The unmatched organizational skill of Lamberti became evident during the five NATO Advanced Study Institutes that he organized on: Nematode Vectors of Plant Viruses in 1974, Root Knot Nematode (*Meloidogyne*) species in 1977, Durable Resistance in Crops in 1981, Cyst Nematodes in 1985, and Advances in Molecular Plant Nematology in 1993. For each of these Institutes he acted as editor of the proceedings. Lamberti also organised several other national and international scientific meetings, among which was the 15th International Symposium of the European Society of Nematologists, held in Bari in 1980 while he was president of the Society (1978-1980).

Lamberti was co-founder of the Italian Society of Nematology (SIN), of which he was president from 1981 to 1995. He was also secretary treasurer of the Mediterranean Phytopathological Union from 1983 to 1994 and president of the same Union from October 2002 until his passing, at which time he was busy organizing the next congress of the Union scheduled to be held in Bari, Italy, in 2005. He also served on the organizing and scientific committee of several national and international meetings and on the editorial boards of scientific journals. In the 1980s he served as a member of the Agriculture Consulting Committee of CNR for two terms (eight years), being instrumental in promoting agricultural research in Italy. Also, he has been a representative of CNR in international meetings.

Lamberti was very proud of the service he rendered to the international scientific communities through this journal "Nematologia Mediterranea", which he founded in 1973 and for which he served as editor until 2003 when the 31st volume was published.

Remarkable also was Lamberti's teaching activity, which included nematology courses at the University of Bari (1968-1986), at the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of CIHEAM, Valenzano, near Bari, and at foreign Universities, as well as the supervision of several theses in nematology and plant pathology of graduating students.

As a consultant of International Agencies, he travelled a lot and contributed to the foundation of Nematology Research Institutes in Sri Lanka, Malta, Mauritius and Liberia.

In 1988 he had heart problems and was operated on. While convalescent, for a few months, he promised to reduce his activity but, as soon as he felt recovered, he re-started and became even more active than ever.

During his career, Lamberti described 100 new species of nematodes of the genera *Xiphinema* (68), *Longidorus* (19), *Paralongidorus* (3), *Trichodorus* (1), *Criconeoides* (1), *Ogma* (1), *Mesocriconema* (4), *Discocriconemella* (1), *Plesiorotylenchus* (1) and *Afenestrata* (1), focusing on their geographic distribution and interspecific variability. On these genera, he published three atlases of their distribution in Italy, Malta, and Bulgaria. He authored or co-authored 665 scientific and popular articles and more are in press. Because of his intense scientific activity, Lamberti was recognised as Fellow of the Society of Nematologists and, in 2003, received the Distinguished Service Award and Special Award of the Organization of Nematologists of Tropical America (ONTA).

Officially he had retired on 1st July of this year but was still full of enthusiasm, ideas, research projects and trips to undertake, and meetings to organize. Unfortunately, his death was both sudden and untimely on the morning of 16 August last, in his armchair at home, probably during a pause in writing manuscripts, leaving his family, his colleagues and collaborators and the entire nematology community in deep sadness and sorrow. Lamberti is survived by his wife Teresa, his daughter Carlotta, his son Lamberto and his grandchildren Paolo and Francesca, and was proudly awaiting a third grandchild. To all of them we send the heartfelt condolences of the nematology family.

According to the scientific community, "Franco was a unique person" and we (the Institute) "have lost someone who has truly made an outstanding contribution to the science of nematology and whose opinions have always been respected". "Franco dedicated his life time to the pursuit of scientific knowledge and leaves behind a legacy of achievement, a truly remarkable man". "He was an exceptional person". "He will be remembered 'as one of the great movers in nematology in this last half century. He not only had ideas but he ensured that they were followed up and developed appropriately. He had a sense of humour and a sense of what was right'. His restless enthusiasm and dedicated approach will be a long lasting motivation ... and his uncompromising courage will remain exemplary". "He will easily rank as one of the greatest nematologists and was a man of remarkable individuality". Several will remember him as "a mentor and paternal person". His passing is a "great loss to the scientific community and in particular to nematologists". "He will be missed by all of us".

Many colleagues will certainly remember the passion Lamberti had for the football he used to watch on the TV, nice cars, special foods and wines, of which he was a true expert. Also, they will remember the warm hospitality he extended to those attending the meetings he organised and his wife Teresa and he to those visiting them at home. Besides the scientist, many will remember him as the loving husband, "the proud father and grandfather, and as a dear friend".

In the Institute, Lamberti was very demanding of himself and his colleagues and was a tireless worker. When returning from his trips from abroad he always carried nematode material as gifts to distribute among different specialists along with suggestions of how to obtain the maximum out of them. In his office Prof. Lamberti was as he appears in the above photograph, surrounded by papers and books, in apparently chaos but for himself perfect order, always ready to listen, to guide, to encourage and defend, with plenty of ideas to develop and, sometimes, even paternal suggestions. He has greatly contributed to our scientific growth.

Thank you very much Prof. Lamberti for all you did for most of us, the Institute and the entire scientific community.