



Laudation for Dr. Otto Spaargaren

By Prof. Jozef (Seppe) Deckers

Chair of the Selection Committee of the IUSS

Guy Smith Award

Distinguished authorities, delegates, Mr. President of the IUSS, Mr. Chairman of the IUSS Division of Soil in Space and Time, participants of the 20th World Congress of Soil Science, it is a real honor for me to provide this laudation for **Dr. Otto Spaargaren** at the occasion of the handing over of the **third Guy Smith medal for soil classification**.

The Guy Smith Award Selection Committee has unanimously selected Dr. **Otto Spaargaren** as the winner of the 2014 Guy Smith Medal Award.

Dr. Otto has been recognized for his major contributions to international soil classification and correlation with special reference to the World Reference Base for Soil Resources (WRB).



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Otto Spaargaren (Born on 10th June, 1944) obtained his M.Sc. degree in Physical Geography and Soil Science at the University of Amsterdam in 1974. Five years later he graduated in Mathematics and Sciences at the University of Amsterdam specializing in soil genesis, soil chemistry, thermo-dynamics and soil mineralogy.

Dr. Otto **started his professional career as Educational Officer at the International Soil Museum** (now ISRIC – World Soil Information), Wageningen, The Netherlands. Next to lecturing soil resources and contributing to the soil monolith collection and its reference materials he assisted the Secretariat of the International Society of Soil Science (ISSS) which was based in Wageningen. From his base at ISRIC Otto undertook numerous soils projects all over the world: soil survey for rice production in the Niger Delta in Nigeria; soil survey for the Mahaweli Development Project in Eastern Sri Lanka; feasibility for irrigation in Western Nepal.

From **1983 – 1987** Otto was Soil Correlator in the Soil Survey Unit of the Ministry of Agriculture and Water Development of Zambia. He was not only coordinating and supervising the soil survey work, but elaborated upon the Soil Classification System of Zambia.



From **1988 – 1991** Otto became the Coordinator of the African Acid Soils Network of the International Board for Soil Research and Management (IBSRAM). In this capacity Otto was putting to good use its soil classification to organize and streamline field experiments in Burundi, Cameroon, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Madagascar, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal and Zambia.

In **1992**, Otto prepared for FAO the **first classification system for top soils in the world**.

From **1993** onwards Otto landed back at ISRIC to work on numerous assignments such as establishing a meta-database on Land Quality Indicators (LQI) under the authority from the World Bank; and preparation of a joint **ISSS-ISRIC-FAO World Soil Resources Report on the World Reference Base for Soil Resources**.

This latter publication was so well received during the **1994** World Congress of Soil Sciences at Acapulco, Mexico, that Otto became the **secretary of the IUSS Working Group World Reference base for Soil Resources**, through to 2006. After his retirement in 2007, Otto returned to the field, this time in Ireland where he contributed to the field studies of the soil map of Ireland.



Although Otto acquired his personal research experience in tropical areas, he has a perfect, comprehensive understanding of the whole world of soils, which is of particular importance for soil classification. **His unique feature as of a 'classifier' is the feeling of importance given to criteria or properties when constructing the whole system, and 'a sharp nose' for the consequences of possible defaults in the system when some changes are introduced.**



Otto Spaargaren's **contribution to international soil classification may be defined as designing and checking its architecture (and controlling its rules)**. The other dimension in Otto's approach is **harmony** both within one system and among systems. In Otto's world of soil classification, WRB has its unique place which he iconized as ***"umbrella between equally worthy national soil classification systems"***. With his concern to come to harmonization with Soil Taxonomy, Otto made numerous moves with the definitions of the diagnostics in WRB, so as **to bring WRB and Soil Taxonomy closer to each other.**



His broad soil geographic experience contributed to the development of guidelines for small-scale soil mapping in WRB. These guidelines, rooted in the FAO Soil Resources Map of the World, have opened the scope for streamlining and harmonizing the system of qualifiers in WRB. Developing soil classification for field management applications is one more trend in Otto's research areas, as well as the related attempt of topsoils inventory for classification purposes.



Otto's enthusiasm for soilscares has inspired many young soil scientists. He really is a master in animating the discussions in the profile pits and then bringing the floating ideas towards a consensus by projecting them on his vast field experience. Not only that, during numerous field excursions in the margin of international soil congresses Otto would sneak out to collect numerous soil monoliths which are now on display in the soil museum at ISRIC and at the places of origin all over the world. Otto has been very active in spring- and summer schools of soil classification at ISRIC (Wageningen, The Netherlands) and at the JRC (Ispra, Italy).

Sepe Deckers, Lucia Anjos and Maria Gerasimova, IUSS Guy Smith Medal Award Selection Committee"