

## **Imre Csavas (1934-2010)**

**Laslo Varadi and Michael New**

Imre Csavas was born in a small Hungarian village called Kunmadaras at the edge of the Hortobágy area, where the alkaline soil was not suitable for agriculture, and the life of the people was difficult. His father was an innovative farmer who was a pioneer in the development of various irrigation-based agricultural technologies in order to utilize the poor soil for the benefit of the families and the community in the region. As a clever and open-minded child, Imre spent a lot of time out in the fields with his father. He learned how to ride a horse before riding a bicycle. His childhood experiences had a great impact on his professional career. Imre learned how to utilize the natural resources in a sustainable way, though the term “sustainability” was unknown at time. When the Csavas family lost all of their lands and properties in 1948 due to the nationalization program of the new socialist government after World War II, Imre also learned about social injustice. He was an eminent student in the prestigious high school in Sáropatak, where his attention turned toward natural science. He continued his studies at the Agricultural University of Gödöllő in 1953. Imre was an outstanding student in the university and was awarded first prize at the second National Scientific Student Conference in 1956. That year was an important milestone in Hungarian history, when the people rose against communist suppression. Imre Csavas was one of the founders of the Gödöllő branch of the new, independent student organization (MEFESZ) and an active member of the Revolutionary Committee of the university. When Russian tanks trampled the Hungarian revolution, Imre was arrested and imprisoned for 18 months. After his release from the fearful prisons of Budapest, he started to work for the Irrigation Extension Service of the Ministry of Agriculture. Leading experts in irrigation took the risk of employing this young talented engineer who was considered persona non grata by the regime due to his involvement in the revolution. In 1963 Imre became chief irrigation engineer in Szarvas State Farm where, besides managing irrigated crop production and rice farming on several thousand hectares, he was also doing research and development related to irrigated farming. Imre could utilize his excellent English in his work with European and American companies. He was assigned as the head of the designing and engineering office of Szarvas State Farm in 1970. The office elaborated plans of complex irrigated farms not only for Hungarian customers, but also for developing countries. His career in aquaculture started in 1974, when the Fish Culture Research Institute (HAKI) invited him to assist its newly begun international development program. In this way, HAKI was able to utilize Imre’s valuable knowledge and vast experience in designing and organizing projects, as well as his knowledge of English. The FAO/UNDP supported program was aiming at the upgrading of HAKI into an international research, development and training center that could assist aquaculture development in Europe and also in developing countries through the transfer of the results of applied research to practice. FAO soon acknowledged Imre’s capability and assigned him as National Project Director. The FAO/UNDP program was an important milestone in the history

of HAKI, and its success was largely due to Imre's commitment, dynamism and tireless efforts to implement project activities that included the construction of new R&D facilities, the training of staff and the development of international cooperation. HAKI continues to benefit until now from the FAO/UNDP project that is inseparable from Imre Csavas's name. Between 1983 and 1995 Imre Csavas worked in the FAO Regional Office for Asia Pacific in Bangkok (FAO RAPA) as aquaculture officer. His 13 years work in FAO RAPA was at a time of dynamic aquaculture development in Asia. Imre regularly visited some 25 Asian countries, where he identified aquaculture development opportunities, assisted in the preparation and implementation of aquaculture development projects and in the development of the institutional systems of aquaculture research, training and extension. He was not only the organizer of numerous international meetings and forums but an inspiring speaker and advocate of aquaculture development in Asian countries. He was an acknowledged expert in professional circles and the author or co-author of three books and numerous articles. As an acknowledgement of his activity and achievements in international aquaculture development, he was awarded Honorary Life Membership by the World Aquaculture Society in 1996. During his work in Bangkok as FAO aquaculture officer, he contributed to the development of the "Asian link" of his home institution, HAKI. The active involvement of HAKI in Asian aquaculture development programs is largely based on his previous support. After his retirement from FAO, he settled in the quiet small Hungarian town of Szigetszentmiklós. His vast knowledge and experience was shared with aquaculturists, not only in Hungary but all around the world, through lectures in universities and presentations at international conferences, even after his retirement. Tall and powerfully built, Imre was a keen swimmer and had a bone-crushing handshake. He was strong family man, a kind host and a great debater. His eldest two children from his first wife Eniko, are Katalin, who works in HAKI, and Imre, who also works in Szarvas. Krisztian, the son of Imre and his second wife Gitta, was recently married and is a PhD student in aquaculture in Hungary. Imre also had three grandchildren, Katalin, Gabor and Daniel. On aquaculture missions he was a great traveling companion, ready to try every cuisine with gusto. He had a reputation for being able to consume the spiciest possible food, once surprising his Bhutanese hosts (for example) by asking for extra chillies on the curry that they thought would be too hot for any Westerner! His aquaculture colleagues in Bangkok remember him as very firm in his views, always making incisive, practical and sensible comments in aquaculture forums. In private, his views often led to lively debates with his aquaculture colleagues; usually he was right. He was a keen and knowledgeable collector of orchids, which adorned every spare space in and outside his house in the old part of the city of Bangkok. During the last few years of his life he had become unusually quiet and reserved; finally on the 9th of April 2010 we lost him forever. Aquaculture communities in Hungary in Asia and elsewhere in the world will always remember this emblematic figure of global aquaculture development at the end of the twentieth Century. He will be sorely missed by all who knew and worked with him.