

## Editor's Notebook



**Scott Geyer**  
Editor & Publisher

## World Food Prize Recognizes Advances In Sustainable Agriculture

By Bruce Derksen, Contributing Editor

Dr. Mariangela Hungria, a microbiologist from São Paulo and a researcher at the Embrapa Soybean Center in Londrina, Brazil, has been named the 2025 World Food Prize Laureate for her groundbreaking contributions to agricultural science.

The prestigious \$500,000 award recognizes Dr. Hungria's contributions to creating safe, affordable, nutritious, sustainable and equitable food systems worldwide.

The award ceremony took place at Community Choice Event Center in Des Moines and was led by Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds and announced by Foundation President Mashal Husain, with remarks from Board Chair Paul Schickler and Foundation CEO Tom Vilsack.

Over four decades, Dr. Hungria developed numerous biological seed and soil treatments that enable crops to better access nutrients through soil bacteria. Her early advocacy for biological nitrogen fixation has boosted yields and reduced reliance on synthetic fertilizers, which are extremely expensive, pollute rivers and reservoirs, and emit high levels of greenhouse gases.

At a time when soil science was male-dominated and focused on chemicals, Dr. Hungria championed sustainable methods that harness natural bacteria to reduce costs and environmental impacts.

"Winning this award is like the Nobel of agriculture, and it was something I never expected in my life," Dr. Hungria says. "I wasn't aware of my nomination and was surprised when they called me and said I was the winner. I'm just a Brazilian researcher fighting her whole life for research funding and had no expectations of competing with other applicants, but it's extremely important for me as it's the prize for my lifetime."

She explains that when she was attending university, she only had classes about chemicals.

"We were at the top of the Green Revolution, where plant breeding and chemical fertilizers were considered mandatory for high production," she says. "I knew inside, and I never doubted that there was room for biologicals. I understood that to be successful, I must achieve the highest yields as possible using biologicals."

Dr. Hungria conducted research to identify the optimal microorganisms and technologies for achieving high yields. At the soybean center, she identified the best methods and then demonstrated their effectiveness directly to farmers. Her efforts contributed to Brazil's leadership in agricultural biologicals, showcasing practical results beyond the lab and experimental fields.



**"Winning this award is like the Nobel of agriculture, and it was something I never expected in my life," Dr. Hungria says.**

Dr. Hungria's microbial inoculants are used on 85% of Brazil's soybean fields, covering more than 40 million hectares. They save farmers \$25 billion annually, reduce CO2 emissions by 230 million metric tons, and deliver yields higher than those achieved with synthetic fertilizers. Her innovations have also been adopted worldwide.

"It was a dream to receive this prize, and the response from newspapers and the internet has been fantastic," she says. "It's an amazing opportunity to show that the use of biologicals replacing chemicals in agriculture is a feasible technology."

She believes this recognition has also shed light on women in agriculture and in science.

"Many women have reached out, inspired to see themselves in my journey, proving that, with dedication, dreams like advancing sustainable farming through biologicals are possible, regardless of gender."

The award includes a financial prize, which Dr. Hungria will use to establish an institution that will provide awards to women who are making a positive impact globally.

"I'm hopeful that this institution will be launched soon, supporting and inspiring women leaders in agriculture and science."

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**Pierce and his wife, Joan, have crafted miniature circus models for more than 50 years, selling many to model railroaders who include them in their train displays.**

## Wisconsin Couple Builds Miniature Circus Models

By Lorn Manthey, Contributing Editor

"My interest in miniature circus figures began when I was barely old enough to open a glue can," says Ralph Pierce, a craftsman from Baraboo, Wis. "I was 8 years old when the Circus World Museum opened in Baraboo, and from that point on I was hooked on circus models."

The museum remains a thriving business today. For the past 52 years, Pierce and his wife, Joan, have been circus craft makers and collectors of circus memorabilia. They've produced and sold circus models, tents and dioramas to hundreds of collectors, companies and organizations.

Ralph and Joan like to point out that "while some people might complain that their life is a circus, ours truly is, and we've always enjoyed it."

After collecting thousands of pieces of circus memorabilia, they opened a circus hobby store in Baraboo.

"People who visited the Circus Museum would visit our store and learn about our model and diorama-building business. Gem City Amusements just grew from there."

During a trip to an Ohio model show in the late 70s, they learned that custom-made miniature circus tents were hard to find. Ralph soon began designing tiny tents, and Joan cut the patterns from tent fabric and sewed the pieces together with durable specialty fishing line.

"Over the years, we've sold tents to people all over the U.S. and many foreign countries," Ralph says.

Some are very tiny; others are about 12 in. wide by 2 ft long, and some are large, measuring 30 in. wide by 8 ft long.

Their largest contract required nearly 6 years to carefully refurbish a circus model set built in the 1930s and 1940s. When it was completed, Ralph says three shipping containers were needed to move it from Connecticut to California. Those artifacts and exhibits now trace circus history at the Rancho Quien Sabe Retreat Center in Tres Pinos, Calif.

"In the early 1990s, we were asked by a model railroad supplier to build small circus tents to be sold because of the growing interest in circus modeling created by the annual Schlitz Circus Parade, held in Milwaukee," Ralph says. "The parade was viewed by more than a half million people, so it was a huge event. Joan had to have extra help to build 3,000 small tents for the interest that parade created."

The Pierces have always strived for authenticity in their miniatures. Their characters, wagons, tents and other items

are scaled from images in their collection of 600 lithographs dating back to 1893. The collection includes more than 5,000 pictures, many books, negatives, route maps, programs and souvenir items for reference.

"Our customers have evolved over the years from circus model collectors to model railroaders who now want to add the color and excitement of an authentic circus and tent display to their layouts," Ralph says. "We make those because railroads were an integral part of moving a circus across the U.S. before the freeway system. Some circus trains were almost a mile long."

Ralph produces dioramas that showcase all aspects of the circus, including rarities such as high divers, a 6-legged horse, the world's largest twins and clown cars, to name a few.

"I always add things that provide realism, like performing horses, vegetation, railcars and different circus wagons. The people even wear authentic clothing and custom jewelry."

The golden age of circus performances has waned, and the Pierces are gradually winding down their business.

"We've made thousands of items for collectors, museums and displays across the country. It's been a lot of fun, and we've met amazing people. The miniatures we've made really give people an idea of what the 'Greatest Show on Earth' was like years ago," Ralph says.

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## Liberty Quotes

"Ninety-nine percent of failures come from people who make excuses." *George Washington Carver*

"Anybody can become angry — that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way — that is not within everybody's power and is not easy." *Aristotle*

"Unlike statements of fact, which require no further work on our part, lies must be continually protected from collisions with reality." *Sam Harris*

"One's philosophy is not best expressed in words; it is expressed in the choices one makes... and the choices we make are ultimately our responsibility." *Eleanor Roosevelt*

"It always seems impossible until it's done." *Nelson Mandela*

"Work hard, be kind, and amazing things will happen." *Conan O'Brien*

"All adventures, especially into new territory, are scary." *Sally Ride*

**Ole and Sven were deer hunting.** They didn't see a deer all morning. Nothing in the afternoon either. It was starting to get dark, and they decided to give up and head back.

They walk for a bit, realize they must have taken a wrong turn, and are lost.

Ole tells Sven, "Vell, I heard dat if you're lost in da woods, you're supposed to fire tree times in da air."

Sven says, "Vell, okay, I'll try it," and fires three times into the air.

They wander some more, and it's pitch black now. They're still totally lost.

"Vell, try firing in da air again; someone might be out looking for us," Ole says.

Sven fires again. An hour later, they're more lost than before and are starting to realize they might have to spend the night in the woods.

Ole says, "Vell, I don't vant ta sleep out here in da cold. Try firing tree times in da air again."

Sven replies, "I can't. I'm all out of arrows."

**After shooting a moose,** Ole and Sven began dragging it by the tail to their truck.

On the way, they were stopped by a game warden. "I need to see your hunting licenses," he said.

When he saw that everything was in order, he offered them some advice.

"I think you'd find it a lot easier to drag the moose by the horns, not the tail."

"Ya, okay. Tanks," they said.

After dragging the moose for about five minutes, Ole said to Sven, "Draggin' it by da horns sure is easier!"

"Ya, you're right," says Sven. "But, have you noticed dat vee are getting furdur away from da truck?"