

From Fields to Fame: Dr Vasal Conferred with Padma Shri for Agricultural Innovation

On January 26, 2025, President Smt. Droupadi Murmu conferred the prestigious Padma Shri Award upon Dr Surinder Kumar Vasal, recognizing his extraordinary contributions to science and engineering. This accolade celebrates his transformative work in maize breeding and genetics, which has significantly advanced global food security over a career spanning more than four decades. The ceremony, held in New Delhi, highlighted Dr Vasal's dedication to agricultural innovation, particularly his development of the revolutionary "Miracle Maize," a high-yield, nutrient-rich variety that has bolstered food supplies worldwide.



Dr Vasal, an eminent maize geneticist, has left an indelible mark on agricultural science. His journey began in the Agriculture Department of Himachal Pradesh, where he honed his expertise in plant breeding. His early work laid the foundation for a career defined by groundbreaking achievements. One of his most notable contributions was his pivotal role in developing Suwan-1, a maize variety that gained international acclaim for its resilience and productivity. This variety became a cornerstone for farmers across diverse agro-climatic regions, enhancing crop yields and livelihoods.

The cornerstone of Dr Vasal's legacy is his development of quality protein maize (QPM), often referred to as "Miracle Maize." This innovation addressed critical nutritional deficiencies in maize-dependent populations, particularly in developing nations. By enhancing the protein content and amino acid balance of maize, QPM has improved dietary outcomes for millions, combating malnutrition and supporting healthier communities. His work at the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) was instrumental in scaling QPM's global impact, earning him widespread recognition.

Dr Vasal's contributions have been celebrated with numerous accolades, including the prestigious World Food Prize in 2000, shared with his colleague Dr. Evangelina Villegas. Often dubbed the "Nobel Prize for Food and Agriculture," this honor acknowledged their collaborative efforts in advancing QPM, which has become a vital tool in the fight against hunger. His recognition as a Millennium World Food Prize Laureate further underscores his role as a global leader in agricultural innovation.

The Padma Shri Award, one of India's highest civilian honors, reflects Dr Vasal's enduring commitment to science and humanity. His work exemplifies the intersection of scientific rigor and social impact, addressing pressing challenges like food insecurity and malnutrition through sustainable solutions. By developing maize varieties that thrive in diverse conditions, he has empowered farmers, strengthened agricultural economies, and uplifted vulnerable populations.

President Murmu, in conferring the award, lauded Dr Vasal's contributions align with India's vision of fostering innovation for societal good, making him a fitting recipient of this honor. He was one of the key players to develop Suwan-1, an internationally popular variety of maize. At 89, Dr Vasal remains an inspiration, demonstrating how scientific excellence can drive meaningful change. His legacy continues to shape agricultural practices and inspire future generations of scientists to tackle global challenges with creativity and compassion.

In accepting the Padma Shri, Dr Vasal expressed gratitude for the recognition, emphasizing the importance of collaborative efforts in agricultural research. His journey from Himachal Pradesh to global prominence serves as a testament to the power of perseverance and innovation in transforming lives.