

ANNEMARIE VAN ZAAZEN:

‘We mustn’t let practical plant

‘I am very enthusiastic about my subject and I want to leave my money to a good cause,’ says virologist Annemarie van Zaayen. That is why she has included the L. Bos Fund for plant virology in her will.

TEXT ANJA JANSSEN



FOTO ALAMY

With great regret, Annemarie van Zaayen (79) relates how she saw funding for her subject area, ecological plant virology, dwindle during the course of her career. ‘That is a great pity because new viral diseases are emerging all the time, and it is exactly that practical knowledge about symptoms and how diseases spread that is still needed. An infectious tomato virus turned up recently in the Westland greenhouses, for example.’ By contrast, molecular research on plant viruses in laboratories has made great strides. ‘It really is marvellous what they can do with genetic analyses. But it doesn’t solve everything. In the lab, they find DNA

or RNA of all kinds of viruses but then they don’t know what they do: are they harmful or in fact beneficial? Which symptoms do they cause, and how do they spread?’ So a donation to the L. Bos Fund for ecological plant virology was an obvious choice for Van Zaayen when she came to make her will. This fund was established by the family of virologist Lute Bos (1928-2010) and has financed special professor René van der Vlugt’s chair of Ecological Virology at Wageningen University & Research for one day a week for the past five years. Ecological plant virology looks at the role of viruses in farming systems and in nature. This ‘green’ plant virology was Lute Bos’s subject and his

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passion. The fund is almost empty now, but the university has extended Van der Vlugt's appointment for five years and is now paying his salary.

Van Zaayen: 'I don't have a partner anymore, I have no children and not much family. I am very enthusiastic about my subject and I want to leave my money to a good cause. So I thought: I support the objective of the L. Bos Fund, let me invest it in that. And I've had a guarantee from University Fund Wageningen that when that money of mine comes in, they will do something useful with it in the chair group. I know, for instance, that Van der Vlugt needs a lot of assistance at the moment.'

Van Zaayen thought it was important to make good arrangements for her will while she is still healthy. And she hopes to inspire others to follow her example. 'I prefer to keep out of the limelight, but I thought I should tell my story because we mustn't let this subject area die out.'

After graduating in Plant Pathology in 1966, Van Zaayen did research at the then Institute for Phytopathological Research (IPO) – where Lute Bos worked too – on a destructive viral disease that was affecting mushrooms and posing a serious economic problem for mushroom growers.

ELECTRON MICROSCOPE

'In Wageningen I studied the virus under the electron microscope, and at what was then the Mushroom Experimental Station in Horst I did the practical experiments to study how the disease spread.' This research led to her obtaining her PhD in 1972.

Van Zaayen went on to work as a plant pathologist at the Mushroom Experimental

L. BOS FONDS

The L. Bos Fund is a named fund under University Fund Wageningen. Donations to this fund support scientific research and education in the Wageningen Ecological Plant Virology chair group.

www.universityfundwageningen.eu/lbosfund

Virologist Annemarie van Zaayen has included the L.Bos Fund for plant virology in her will.



PHOTO ALDO ALLESSIE

Station in Horst, at the Bulb Laboratory in Lisse, at the tissue culture company PhytoNova in Rijnsburg, and for a short while at the IPO. For the last 10 years of her career, she was head of a branch of the then Netherlands Inspection Service for Arboriculture Products NAKB (now Naktuinbouw (the Netherlands Inspection Service for Horticulture) in Roelofarendsveen), which maintains and promotes the quality of horticultural products.

After Van Zaayen had arranged for the L. Bos Fund to be included in her will, she was invited to Wageningen by Professor Van der Vlugt. 'We know each other from the IPO and the Plant Virology circle, which sadly is not very active at present. At that time he gave a short overview of his projects especially for me. I was very interested to hear how dynamic it is: he works on a lot of different topics and has students from tropical countries too. Viral diseases are often unknown there, or badly researched. Another thing that fascinates me is a project on maturity resistance against aphids – which transmit certain viruses – in sugar beets and how viruses can inhibit this resistance mechanism. I'm sure we can expect a lot more nice results from this research.' ■

LEGACIES IN A WILL

More and more people are including charities in their will. People interested in leaving money to Wageningen research or education are welcome to get in touch with Arianne van Ballegooij of the University Fund Wageningen at Arianne.vanballegooij@wur.nl.

More information can be found at www.universityfundwageningen.nl/legacy.