

Miguel Holle (1937-2023)

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Geneticist, plant explorer, germplasm conservationist and educator Miguel Holle passed away surrounded by his family in Lima Peru on April 11, 2023. He did his undergraduate work in horticulture at Colorado State University, Fort Collins and obtained his PhD at Iowa State University under Lincoln Peirce. He started his academic career at Universidad Agraria La Molina in Lima Peru in the early 1960's where he taught courses in horticulture and vegetable breeding. Miguel provided a nurturing environment for his students encouraging them to be critical thinkers and self-reliant. Together with Alfredo Montes and Gunter Bushbek they organized a progressive research program on vegetable crops production, genetics and breeding and post-harvest at El Huerto (the orchard) at La Molina. His plant exploration days started in 1970 when Charley Rick asked him to organize an expedition to collect wild tomatoes in Peru. This began a long friendship and collaboration between the two scientists spanning four decades, to collect and study the wild tomato relatives throughout South America. In his memoirs Rick described their meeting as “We had fallen in with the most wonderful person, who

was to be our friend, colleague, mentor, and most delightful travel companion, not only for these three months, but for many more trips and visits both in South America and in the US, and prospects for future adventures continuing. Thus, by affiliating with Miguel, we may have experienced the luckiest break of our entire tomato chasing experiences!”. Miguel knew his country particularly well and was intimately familiar with the ecology and distribution of the wild tomato relatives, allowing the collection of natural populations from the coastal zone to the Andean regions of Peru, as well as Chile and Ecuador. As Dr. Holle's former graduate students, we (CFQ, EV) were able to participate in those collecting trips on more than one occasion. His participation in these numerous forays resulted in the collection of over 720 accessions, representing a large share of the wild material maintained by the CM Rick Tomato Genetics Resource Center at UC Davis. This national and international germplasm bank serves tomato researchers and breeders throughout the world. His work led to numerous research articles.

In 1975 Miguel spent a sabbatical year at the Department of Vegetable Crops, at UC Davis in the laboratory of Dr. Rick. After his return, he found the political situation in Peru unfavorable for research and academic activities at the university, prompting him to start his international career. Miguel first worked at CATIE in Turrialba, Costa Rica for several years on tropical horticulture, and then moved to CIAT in Colombia to work on genetic resources. Miguel returned to Peru in the 1980's to work in the city Puno promoting the conservation and cultivation of native Andean crops, in an internationally sponsored program. Finally, he joined the International Potato Center (CIP) where he managed the CONDESAN Program (Consortio para el Desarrollo Sostenible de la Ecoregion Andina) which provided research grants to researchers working on Andean crops in Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia. At the end of his career, he co-authored a book with Ricardo Sevilla on conservation of genetic resources entitled “Recursos Genéticos Vegetales.”

Miguel made an indelible impression on those with whom he interacted for his dedication to research and conservation of genetic resources, and foremost for his passion for teaching. He will be remembered as an excellent and charismatic teacher who was always willing to help his students but letting them find their own ways to attain their independence. We were extremely lucky to have had him as a mentor and later as a good friend and colleague.

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