

## **OBITUARY**

**Josef Palti**  
1915–1998



### *IN MEMORIAM*

Dr. Josef Palti passed away in Tel Aviv, Israel, on November 10, 1998, at the age of 83, after a long and rich career in crop protection. He pioneered a wide array of activities and areas in Israel: farming; working for the chemical industry; research in plant pathology; establishing an aerial spraying firm; both laying the groundwork for private advisory work and establishing public extension in crop protection; co-founding the Israel Association for Phytopathology (now the Israeli Phytopathological Society); writing and publishing.

Born in Berlin on February 18, 1915, Palti moved to England with the rise of Naziism in Germany. After completion of high school in England, he studied agriculture at Reading University, UK, majoring in plant protection and receiving the B.Sc. degree. After immigrating to Israel (then Palestine) in 1934, he spent several years in various Kibbutz settlements and worked in the local branch of Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI). Following his work in the pesticide industry, he joined the Division of Phytopathology of the Agricultural Research Station, the precursor of the Agricultural Research Organization (ARO), as assistant to the Head of the Division, Prof. I. Reichert, with whom he co-authored numerous pioneering papers on plant diseases of field crops, vegetables and grapevines. Together with the well-known entrepreneur W. van Leer, he was instrumental in the creation of 'Chimavir', the first and largest aerial spray company in Israel and served as its technical manager. In the mid-1950s, Palti and the late S. Moeller took advantage of a most particular opportunity: the need of progressive collective settlements (Kibbutzim) and cooperative farms (Moshavim) for sophisticated technical support and assistance in crop production and protection. Together with an experienced and enthusiastic group of young crop husbandry and protection specialists, all endowed with a down-to-earth approach to cropping, and with a 'green thumb', they established a private consulting firm. The firm provided regular advisory services to field crop and vegetable growers all over the country, its main focus being pest, disease and weed control.

In 1960 the Government decided to consolidate public agricultural extension and merged the separate advisory entities of the Jewish Agency and of the Ministry of Agriculture. Unwilling to compete with advisory work provided free-of-charge by the Government, Palti, Moeller, H. Shoham, and H. Yogev joined the newly established Extension Service. As the leading figure in the area of advisory work in crop protection, Palti was appointed Head of the Crop Protection Division, with Moeller being appointed Head of the Vegetable Production Unit. Palti laid out the conception, the structure and the mechanism of crop protection extension in this country. With his approach being supported by the experience gained while running private advisory work, he advocated mastering and

covering all three plant protection disciplines, namely, pest, disease and weed control, and specialized by crops for crop protection extension specialists. This approach has proved successful to the present day. It enables provision of crop protection advice to growers, based on comprehensive diagnostics of all factors inflicting losses on the crop and good acquaintance of crop protection extension specialists with crop production practices, pesticide mixtures and pesticide application techniques. But first of all, this approach supplies the right infrastructure to embark on the promotion of Integrated Pest Management. Palti had to struggle for his vision. He stood his ground defending it and resisted all attempts to adopt a different approach, namely, that of appointing separately extension entomologists, plant pathologists and weed control specialists.

Over the first years of the Extension Service's activity, Palti actively recruited new staff for his division. He created a challenging blend between experienced old hands with no formal education but plenty of practical experience, and young university graduates, preferably with farming background. The new group, based on experience, motivation and education, was spread all over the country and addressed all crop and production branches. Palti's managerial style was unique. He led the group with much drive and authority, but left to all of its members plenty of room to express their own 'forte' and professional aspirations. He designed career structures for all of his extension specialists, putting them on the track of further formal and informal studies, study tours, conferences and writing.

Technical writing was of the highest value in his view, a way to share experience, know-how and information with clientele and the discipline to organize one's thoughts in the right, systematic way. He used to gather and enter information on punch cards on the date of first appearance of plant diseases on all crops, and all growing regions and sub-regions. After analyzing these data, he developed empirical crop-pest calendars, warning tools and negative forecasting. These served to reduce redundant application of farm chemicals. He initiated the publication of a weekly leaflet reviewing the pest status of crops and providing forecasts and warnings, based on weekly telephone reporting of all regional crop protection extension specialists. These leaflets, turned into biweekly reports, are still being published, 35 years after start-up. Palti wrote several books in Hebrew on diseases of grain crops and of vegetable crops as well as several review articles on downy and powdery mildews and toxic Fusaria (e.g. *The Leveillula Mildews*. *Bot. Rev.* 423 (1988); *Cultural Practices and Infectious Crop Diseases*, 1981, Springer Verlag, Berlin). He had a vision of disseminating state-of-the-art information to Arab growers in the country and successfully urged Dr. H. Yunis, an Arab crop protection extension specialist and close associate, to translate books and guides into Arabic. In close collaboration with R. Ausher, he edited the first book (*Advisory Work in Crop Pest and Disease Management*, 1986, Springer Verlag, Berlin) addressing the new area of methodologies in support of crop protection extension, inviting chapters from leading international figures. While running the Crop Protection Division in Extension, he fulfilled the requirements for the M.Sc. degree in crop protection awarded by Reading University, and completed his studies for the Ph.D. degree. His dissertation dealing with Fusaria of Cucurbits in Israel was done under the guidance of Prof. A. Yoffe, Department of Botany, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Most of his research work centered on forecasting of plant diseases and much of his activity in this respect was carried out in close collaboration with Prof. J. Rotem of The Volcani Center (ARO) and Prof. J. Krantz of the Tropeninstitut at Giessen, Germany.

Palti's dynamic personality and rich experience in both research and extension made him a much sought-after lecturer in both the domestic and international arena. He was a strong polemic and enjoyed being provocative and challenging the audience or discussion panels. Feeling that his pioneering role had come to an end, he resigned from the Extension Service in 1974 to dedicate more time to his other deep interest – publishing and writing. He moved to the Agricultural Research Organization as Director of the Dept. of Scientific Publications. After his retirement, he devoted all his insatiable energy to his beloved *Hassadeh*, the Hebrew-language monthly periodical on agriculture, where he served as a member of the Managerial Board and as editor of the Crop Protection Section. He played a major role in the promotion of *Hassadeh*, being instrumental in

increasing subscription figures to an overall high of 8000. In the last years, in poor health but energetic, he edited in cooperation with Drs. Rotem and Y. Ben-Yephet edited *Plant Diseases of Israel* (ARO, Bet Dagan, Israel), a comprehensive and updated (1998) publication in Hebrew.

Dr. Palti was endowed with charisma and drive. He was, undoubtedly, the 'enfant-terrible' of crop protection of his time. He left behind a group of skilled extension specialists in crop protection who follow to this very day the approach conceived by him. The validity of his rationale and *modus operandi* in extension crop protection is evidence of his pioneer vision and experience. He wrote, edited and published a wide array of articles, booklets, leaflets and books incorporating know-how and information in both English and Hebrew. He shared knowledge for decades with the top professionals and researchers, as well as with a large group of producers, and with niche audiences such as Arab growers, field staff of the chemical industry, spray pilots, crop advisors, etc. But much more than the written word he has left behind the legacy of proactive, professional, field-oriented extension crop protection, encompassing all crop protection disciplines and laying the groundwork for our generation's main technical objective: reducing the amount of pesticide use through promotion of Integrated Pest Management. His most tangible contribution to crop protection in this country was the formation of a strong nucleus of disciples who carry on his ideas to this very day. In the name of his followers in crop protection extension, we humbly attempt to express our thanks for his leadership.

Dr. Palti is survived by his wife Nenette, three children, Naomi, Roni and Dani, and nine grandchildren.

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