

Thais Fernanda Stella de Freitas was an agronomist with a BSc. degree at the Instituto Rio Grandense in Porto Alegre, Brazil when she received the ARFUSA Award. This award provided the opportunity for her to spend six months at the International Rice Research Institute. She credits the award as being the springboard to the position of Professor which she holds today.

She spent six months at IRRI in 2011. During that time, under the guidance of IRRI entomologist, Dr. Finbarr Horgan, Thais conducted research on host plant resistance to the brown planthopper (BPH) with special emphasis on the mechanisms of rice tolerance. She stated that “the experience that I had was an amazing opportunity to learn about rice production and rice entomology. What was most useful is that I could understand the relationship between the outbreaks of the BPH and intensive cropping in Asia and therefore learn how we can avoid these high populations of rice pests in Brazil”.

“During my stay at IRRI I also enrolled in the course “Rice: research to production, which was taught by some of the world’s most knowledgeable rice scientists. There I heard lectures on rice breeding and molecular technologies, plant pathology, soil, environmental and social sciences, crop protection, water management, seed production and post-harvest technology. This course also provided the opportunity to meet with farmers to better understand their constraints”.

“I arrived back in Brazil with a renewed motivation to study for the Ph.D. During my Ph.D. studies at the Universidad Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) I spent 10 months at Louisiana State University on a sandwich program under the mentorship of rice entomologist Dr. Michael Stout”.

“Once I concluded the Ph.D. at UFRGS I was employed by a private company that conducts rice research and provides extension information to farmers in Rio Grande do Sul. There I was able to put into practice all the knowledge and experience I had accumulated in my training at IRRI and in my Ph D. program at UFRGS and LSU. In 2019 I achieved my dream, that of being a professor at a public university, the Federal University Pampa where I am teaching general entomology and agricultural entomology to agronomy students”.

“I’m extremely grateful to the Asia Rice Foundation USA for providing me with this amazing opportunity, which was my first international experience as a professional. It certainly broadened my horizons, allowed me to experience rice science at a high level, and enabled me to develop a network of the world’s top rice scientists. It was of unquestionable value to my career; I now demand more of myself and push myself to constantly develop new skills. I am now sharing my knowledge and skills with my students at the Federal University Pampa at Bagé, Rio Grande do Sul”.

Thais Fernanda Stella de Freitas, 2011 Award Winner