

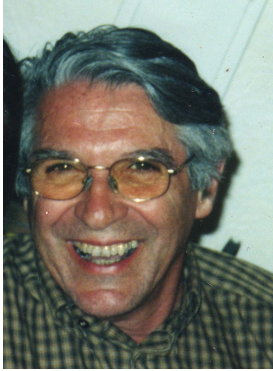


Obituary: Rafael Pont-Lezica (1940–2011)

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Rafael Pont-Lezica, Plant Physiology, Biochemistry, and Biotechnology Emeritus Professor at the Université de Toulouse, passed away on September 26, 2011 after losing his fight with cancer. He had studied agronomy at the Universidad Nacional de Cuyo, in Argentina, and in 1978 earned a Ph. D. at the Université de Gembloux, Belgium.

Rafael began his scientific career as a Research Assistant in Plant Physiology at the Universidad Nacional de Cuyo (1966–1971), where his work was centered on plant morphogenesis and secondary metabolism. He then became Assistant Professor in Biology at the Fundación Bariloche, in Argentina (1972–1977), where he developed an interest in sugar metabolism, particularly in the synthesis of cellulose precursors and protein glycosylation.

He obtained a Humboldt Stiftung Fellowship in Dr. Heinrich Kaus' lab in Kaiserslautern, West Germany (1978–1979) and from 1979 to 1988 he was a Professor at the Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata, in Argentina, where he co-founded, with Dr. Horacio Pontis, the Instituto de Investigaciones Biológicas. His main research topics there were on lectin biosynthesis and protein glycosylation. In the course of his first collaboration with Joe Varner, from Washington University in St. Louis, MO, USA, he focused his attention on the study of the plant cell wall. As a consequence he was invited as a visiting profes-

sor at Washington University in St. Louis, MO, USA (1987–1991). A crucial result of this fruitful collaboration was the development of the tissue printing technique, which became an alternative to *in situ* hybridization and immunocytochemistry.

In 1992, Rafael obtained a professorship at the Université de Toulouse and set up his own research group. Following his retirement in 2009, he became Emeritus Professor at the Université de Toulouse. As such he kept up an intense research activity, interacting with his former team, today called Cell Wall Proteins and Development, in reference to his mentorship. Rafael's main research interest was the identification of *Arabidopsis thaliana* RGD-containing or integrin-like proteins involved in cell wall/plasma membrane contacts. He also began to work on plant cell wall proteomics. He presented the first overview of cell wall proteins and identified proteins that had never been described before. His most recent contribution was the setting up of two international research programs, introducing *Brachypodium distachyon* as a model plant for biomass production in our lab: European Knowledge-Based Bio-Economy (KBBE) and Comité Français d'Évaluation de la Coopération Universitaire et Scientifique avec le Brésil (COFECUB). All these developments led to new insights in plant cell wall biology.

At the Université de Toulouse, Rafael directed the Plant Science Master's Program (1999–2004) and the European Marie Curie Training Program SIGNAL (Plant Signaling and Biotechnology; 2001–2005). He was a member of numerous scientific groups and councils at the local, national, and international levels [the Fundación Bariloche, the Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata, the Université de Toulouse, the Ecole Doctorale de Biologie in Toulouse, the Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (CONICET) in Argentina, among others]. Although he developed his career in

many different universities and countries, he stayed in touch with the colleagues with whom he had worked.

Rafael was an appreciated teacher, always encouraging graduate students, postdocs, and young colleagues in the lab. His sound judgment and numerous personal qualities were appreciated and called upon by his colleagues and collaborators. As a researcher and a human being, he was enthusiastic and creative, communicating his drive and love of life to those around him.

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