



PROF. AVIGAD VONSHAK (EMERITUS)

Professor Avigad Vonshak was a faculty member at the Jacob Blaustein Institutes for Desert Research (BIDR) at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Israel and served (2002 – 2010) as the Director of the BIDR which studies the problems of Desertification and strives to develop new methodologies that will help in preventing Desertification and promote sustainable development of drylands. He also was the one to establish the International School for Desert Studies and was its first director (1998-2003) .

His research interests include the study of environmental stress in algae. After finishing his term as the director of the BIDR he was nominated to serve as the Dean for international Academic affairs of BGU. (2010-2012).

The main goal of his studies is to try to understand the mechanisms involved in the adaptation of dense algal cultures to the extreme environment existing in many drylands. Prof. Vonshak is known internationally mainly for his contribution to the development of the biotechnology for mass culturing of the blue-green algae (cyanobacteria) *Spirulina* under large-scale conditions. The concept was developed as part of the approach that sustainable development of drylands requires the need to develop new innovative biotechnologies that will make use of the special environmental condition of drylands and increase the water use efficiency as compared to conventional agriculture methodologies. He taught few courses in the Albert Katz International School for Desert Studies which is the graduate school of the BIDR. The main courses he taught: i, Photosynthesis and stress, ii, Summarizing Presenting and Publishing Scientific Information. He also took part in teaching an advanced course in Algal biotechnology and participated in more than dozen international training courses organized by UNEP on photosynthesis and climate change.

Professor Vonshak served as President of the Asian Pacific Society for Applied Phycology. He has been involved in many international training programs organized by UNEP, UNESCO and other international agencies. He took part in many international meetings presenting keynote lectures related to the potential of algal biotechnology as a tool in sustainable development of drylands. He is also involved in running international training programs on Algal biotechnology and photosynthesis.

In his out of the university activities, he served as the director of the Ben-Gurion Heritage institute (2007-2013), he is the academic advisor for the Ramat-Negev International Training Center for Dryland Agriculture. He is serving in the board of directors of a Hi-Tech cyber accelerator. He is also serving as a special advisor to the Bona-Terra charity foundation devoted to help farmers in the Negev and also serving in the advisory board to the Israeli national lottery “Mifal-Apis”