



Tilahun Yilma

Tilahun Yilma, a veterinary virologist who has developed a number of genetically engineered vaccines for both human and livestock, especially that of rinderpest, a deadly disease of cattle. Yilma's research efforts have advanced our knowledge of vaccine biology, created new vaccines, and saved and empowered lives in developing regions of the world, particularly in Africa.

Dr. Yilma has received numerous awards and recognition and a few are highlighted here. He is a member of the US National Academy of Sciences and a Fellow of the American Academy of Microbiology. In addition, he has received the Ciba-Geigy Award for Research in Animal Science (Highest International Award in Animal Science), the University of California (Davis) 2001-2002 Faculty Research Award (UC Highest Research Award), the University of California (Davis) Distinguished Public Service Award (UC Highest Service Award), and the University of California, School of Veterinary Medicine, Class of 2004 Outstanding Teaching Award.

Yilma's dedication to developing a rinderpest vaccine was matched by a passion to encourage young scientists in developing nations. For years he had watched the best and brightest young minds from struggling nations come to the United States for advanced education, only to find upon graduation that their home nations lacked the sophisticated laboratories necessary to carry out the research they had been trained for. Undaunted, Yilma worked to secure funding for new biotechnology laboratories in developing countries. As a result of his efforts, the U.S. Agency for International Development in 1990, with the help of the Egyptian government, constructed near Cairo the Laboratory of Molecular Biology for Tropical Diseases, an offspring of Yilma's own laboratory at UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine.

Yilma has earned three degrees from UC Davis: a bachelor's degree in veterinary science in 1968, a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree in 1970 and a doctoral degree in microbiology in 1977. He served from 1980 to 1986 as a faculty member in the department of veterinary microbiology and pathology at Washington State University and from 1977 to 1979 as a research associate at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Plum Island Animal Disease Center in New York. He joined the UC Davis faculty in September 1986.