

## Peter Tirosch, founder of Stockton Group, honored for his work to safeguard crops.



PETER TIROSH, who died on February 19, was a revolutionary in the field of biological pesticides.. (photo credit:COURTESY TIROSH FAMILY)

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An Israeli pioneer in biological pesticides, who spearheaded the commercial use of plant extracts as biofungicides, received a posthumous honor for his work at an international forum on Wednesday

night.

Peter Tirosch, founder of the Stockton Group, was recognized for his lifetime of work in the sector at the Agrow Awards 2016 ceremony, held by Agribusiness Intelligence – Informa in London. After immigrating to Israel from Eastern Europe as a child, Tirosch spent more than two decades working in the generic pesticides industry before turning to biological sources and eventually founding the Petah Tikva-based Stockton Group.

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“He had a very good gut feeling about where the industry was heading, what kind of tools the farmers are going to need,” Guy Elitzur, the current CEO of Stockton, told The Jerusalem Post in an interview last week.

“Peter was very visionary in his view, [and he] brought a lot of spirit and passion for what Stockton has been doing for the last 12-15 years in biopesticides.

Gradually, he started building the operation on a global scale.”

Tirosch, who died on February 19, following a short illness, was born in 1940 in Kazakhstan to Polish Jews who had escaped the German invasion.

After losing both his father and a younger brother during the war, he immigrated to the newly founded State of Israel in 1949 and went on to serve in the IDF’s Paratroop Brigade.

Tirosch’s career in agriculture began in 1970, when he started working on a UN Food and Agriculture Organization project in Central America.

Following his stint at the UN, Tirosch worked from 1972 to 1994 at Makhteshim Agan Industries Ltd. (known today as ADAMA Agricultural Solutions Ltd.), one of the world’s leading manufacturers of generic pesticides. In 1994, he left Makhteshim Agan to found AGRIMOR, the company that eventually grew into Stockton, where he worked with his son Ziv, who served as the firm’s CEO until Elitzur took over in January 2016.

While Tirosch founded Stockton as a generic agrochemicals company, his close relationship with farmers on a daily basis helped him understand the gaps that the industry was facing, Elitzur explained. This knowledge, coupled with his exposure to a variety of Israeli technologies, led Tirosch to eventually purchase a start-up in northern Israel, which became the firm’s in-house research and development department, according to Elitzur.

There are generally three types of biological pesticides – microbial products made with bacteria or viruses, those containing larger living creatures, like insects, and those using plant extracts.

“Most other companies raising the flag of biological [pesticides] were basing their research around microbials,” Elitzur said. “We think that plant extracts have other advantages.”

Among those advantages are the ability of plant extracts to be stored as liquid in a bottle, a long shelf life, no special maintenance requirements and compatibility with generic chemical pesticides, according to Elitzur.

“The chemicals are not going to go anywhere in the next 20 to 30 years, so we are looking at the biological [pesticides] as a great partner for the chemicals,” he said.

In June 2015, the Chinese Hebang Group acquired a 51% stake in Stockton in a \$90 million deal. Stockton is perhaps most known in the global agricultural world for its Timorex Gold product, which won an Agrow Award as best new biopesticide in 2013.

Nonetheless, the company has broadened its horizons to focus on aquaculture – offering several plant extract-based products that can prevent diseases in marine life, Elitzur explained.

Still, most of Stockton’s customers are fruit and vegetable growers, due to the increasing wariness of consumers to purchase foods with residues of chemical pesticides.

“There is a lot of customer sensitivity to residue on crops that are being eaten directly,” he said.

The next challenge will be to market plant extract-based biopesticides to farmers cultivating foods that are not eaten correctly – “raw crops” or “broad acre crops” such wheat, corn and cereals, Elitzur continued.

As far as Stockton’s target markets are concerned, the company’s range includes Central and Latin America, the United States, Canada, Eastern Europe, the Philippines and most recently, China. The next place that the firm is aiming to reach is southern Europe, particularly Italy, France and Spain.

Biological pesticides generally have more popularity in places “where people are willing to pay more for healthier food,” or in countries exporting to those places, Elitzur explained.

Not only do the crops themselves have less residue than those sprayed with generic pesticides, but fewer chemicals seep into the ground when products like those developed by Stockton are used, according to Elitzur.



“The entire ecosystem is affected by using more or less chemicals,” he said, adding that many pests are also already resistant to the chemical options.

Looking back at the company’s growth, and at Tirosh’s legacy in particular, Elitzur praised the firm’s founder for bringing his “vision to the global agricultural arena from a small Israeli company 20 years ago, when nobody [had] heard about biopesticides.” Tirosh, he explained, “envisioned the needs, the future and the challenges of agriculture with climate pressure, with the changing needs of the population [and] with less land to grow agriculture.”

“Peter never gave up. He was insistent, persistent and always making everything happen,” Elitzur said. “His ability to see the light and good in everyone, and [to] see that everything can be solvable – I think that’s part of what Stockton is all about today; that’s what Peter founded here at Stockton.”