

Agronomic Science Foundation

Norman E. Borlaug—Recognizing Achievement

“To inspire and recognize exceptional achievement in assuring adequate food and nutrition for all.”

—The World Food Prize Foundation



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When Norman Borlaug, the plant scientist who was born on an Iowa farm in 1914 and went on to save hundreds of millions of lives by teaching the world to feed itself, won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970, there was no award for food production or agricultural advancements. Dr. Borlaug received the award for having contributed the greatest benefit to humankind that year—namely his pivotal role in helping to modernize agriculture in the developing world. In fact, Norman Borlaug was the only person to receive the Peace Prize in the 20th century for work on food production at its most basic level—on the lands of individual farmers.

According to the Nobel committee, the prize was not awarded to the scientist Dr. Norman Borlaug, but rather to the man who—instead of working in a laboratory—put himself at the disposal of suffering humanity by working side by side with them in their fields to alleviate hunger. And it was this man who understood the need to foster and recognize achievements in food production and agriculture who went to the Board of Governors of the Nobel Foundation in 1982 to add such a category. But the foundation was forced to decline, saying that though the need for such



Norman Borlaug's hard work and dedication to solving world hunger has given future scientists an opportunity to be recognized for their own efforts.

recognition was evident, it had not been provided for in Alfred B. Nobel's will and endowment. Therefore, it was not legally possible to establish the new prize.

And so in his characteristic way of setting out to get things done, Borlaug, along with his long-time friend and colleague, Robert Havener, searched for a sponsor. By 1986, he had established the World Food Prize with the help of General Foods. But by 1990, General Foods had been acquired by Phillip Morris, and the company dropped its sponsorship of the award.

Once again exhibiting his never-give-up attitude, Borlaug, along with Havener and A.S. Clausi, who had been vice president at General Foods, found John Ruan, a self-made millionaire who had turned a one-truck gravel hauling operation into a trucking empire. Borlaug and Ruan, who also had been born in a small Iowa town in 1914, struck up a friendship. When Borlaug shared his ambition to find a way to continue giving this prize to people who had made outstanding contributions to feeding a hungry world, Ruan accepted Borlaug's sponsorship challenge.

Today, The World Food Prize recognizes contributions in all fields involved in the world food supply including food and agriculture science and technology, manufacturing, marketing, nutrition, economics, poverty alleviation, political leadership, and the social sciences. In addition to recognizing personal accomplishments, Borlaug established the prize as a way to create role models who would in turn inspire others.

Now a new prize endowed by the Rockefeller Foundation—the Norman Borlaug Award for Field Research and Application—has been established to recognize the next generation of agricultural scientists who are addressing the issues of hunger and food security. Scheduled to be presented during the World Food Prize events this October in Des Moines, IA, the award will recognize exceptional science-based achievement in international agriculture and food production by an individual under 40 who has clearly demonstrated intellectual courage, stamina, and determination in the fight to eliminate global hunger and poverty.

I recently nominated one of our very own Golden Opportunity Scholars for this award—Seth Sherry. Seth is now working as a senior agronomist in Lusaka, Zambia and has been featured several times in this column already. I believe that his enthusiasm, dedication, persistence, and demonstrable research and service contributions will single him out as one who merits consideration for this award. Seth's enthusiasm for international service is most inspiring, and I hope the award jury will agree!