

Remarks at the Opening Ceremony of the US - China Agriculture Roundtable Think Tank Dialogue:
On Food Security and Agriculture Cooperation Beijing, June 12, 2024 by Ambassador Kenneth M.
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Last November, I had the honor to be part of a small group of just 30 Americans who are considered old friends of President Xi Jinping and were invited to meet privately with him in San Francisco. President Xi and I discussed how I had escorted his father, Governor Xi Zhongxun of Guangdong Province, and a group of Chinese provincial officials around the American state of Iowa in 1980. It was the first in a series of agriculture based citizen diplomacy experiences in Iowa and the American heartland that have promoted understanding between our countries. It was followed five years later when young Xi Jinping himself, then a 31 year old county level official from Hebei Province, traveled to Iowa in 1985 to observe corn processing, an experience that President Xi said left a deep impression on him. Building upon that Iowa citizen diplomacy agricultural tradition, as President of the World Food Prize, in 2004 I brought America's greatest agricultural scientist Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Dr. Norman Borlaug to Beijing to take part in a forum hosted by the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Science. And then in October of that year, I welcomed Professor Yuan Longping, the father of hybrid rice and China's greatest agricultural scientist to Iowa to receive our \$250,000 award, considered to be the Nobel Prize for Food and Agriculture. In 2012, I had the privilege to host the U.S. - China High Level Agricultural Symposium at the World Food Prize Hall of Laureates in Des Moines, at which Vice President Xi Jinping gave the keynote address. It marked a high point in the U.S. - China bilateral relationship.

Continuing to build on this Iowa agricultural tradition, my first collaboration with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences came in 2017, when, in the same Hall of Laureates building where President Xi spoke, Dr. Wang Lei and I signed a Memorandum of Cooperation between the World Food Prize Foundation and CASS. I had multiple occasions to visit China over the next three years speaking at CASS events. After retiring from the World Food Prize in 2020, in my role as Strategic Advisor to the U.S. Heartland China Association, working with Governor Bob Holden and Executive Director Min Fan, we have been able to significantly expand on this citizen diplomacy legacy with CASS through a series of virtual and hybrid "Agricultural Roundtable" conferences. These have been a bright spot in the overall troubled bilateral relationship. I am so very pleased that my former State Department colleague Susan Thornton is participating at this 2024 Agricultural Roundtable in Beijing. We need her diplomatic skills, because we are now at a critical point in Sino-American relations. In his historic address to the American business community in San Francisco last November,

President Xi posed this fundamental question: "Are we Partners, or Are we Adversaries?" I believe we must be partners. So, in response to President Xi's question, I put forward a proposal for a decade long U.S. - China partnership to address a great global challenge - - to uplift Africa out of poverty by jointly upgrading farm to market roads all over the African continent. Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and the founder of the World Food Prize, Dr. Norman Borlaug, famously said "If you want to feed Africa, Build Roads." China's upgrading all of its rural road infrastructure was an essential factor in the historic achievement of poverty being eliminated. When I first visited China in 1979, less than 50% of rural roads were improved and 70 % of the population was existing in poverty. By 2019, there was close to 100 % upgraded rural road penetration and poverty had been eliminated. But, it will take a significant citizen diplomacy effort by groups like CASS and the USHCA and the World Food Prize working together to put this proposal on the agenda of government officials in both countries. As a next step in this process, I am pleased to announce that the World Food Prize has invited Professor Li Xinfeng, the president of the China - Africa Institute of CASS to visit Iowa in November for discussions about possible research on tri-partite agricultural cooperation between China, the U.S. and Africa. Now 44 years after that first delegation from China, led by President Xi's father arrived in Des Moines, together we can build upon the legacy of President Xi Jinping's historic connection with Iowa and the American heartland, and through my citizen diplomacy upgraded rural roads proposal, China and America can be partners in leading a great global endeavor to uplift Africa out of poverty, and thereby build and maintain Peace Through Agriculture between our two countries and around the globe.