



Africa's Norman Borlaug

Akinwumi Adesina of Nigeria,
2017 World Food Prize Laureate

Kenneth M. Quinn

After receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970 as Father of the Green Revolution, Dr. Norman Borlaug dreamed of establishing an annual award that could inspire the breakthrough achievements needed to feed the burgeoning global population. In 1986, he created the World Food Prize with the hope that it would one day come to be seen as the “Nobel Prize of Food and Agriculture.” In the three decades since, 45 individuals have been honored as Laureates for their breakthrough achievements in increasing the quality, quantity, and availability of food. With Dr. Borlaug leading the way, these World Food Prize Laureates have spearheaded the single greatest period of food production and hunger reduction in human history.

Continuing this legacy, on June 28, 2017, in a stirring ceremony at the USDA, it was my honor to be joined by U.S. Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue in announcing that the 46th World Food Prize Laureate would be Akinwumi Adesina of Nigeria, the President of the African Development Bank. As I told the audience—filled with ambassadors, members of Congress, and representatives of major food, agribusinesses, and development organizations—Adesina was chosen as the 2017 World Food Prize Laureate for significantly expanding food production in Nigeria, introducing initiatives to exponentially increase the availability of commercial credit for smallholder farmers across Africa, and galvanizing the political will across the continent to transform African agriculture.

Over the past decade, Adesina has passionately pursued major policy, institutional, and financing innovations that have brought enhanced agricultural technologies to millions of African farmers. Included in his accomplishments are:

- His role with the Rockefeller Foundation in organizing the 2006 Africa Fertilizer Summit, which brought African heads of state together to commit to uplifting African agriculture.
- Leading a major expansion of commercial bank lending to farmers, while serving as Vice-President of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA).
- His leadership, while Minister of Agriculture in Nigeria, in introducing the E-Wallet system, which broke the back of corrupt elements that had controlled the fertilizer distribution system for over 40 years.

The legacy of Norman Borlaug

As the first specialist in agriculture ever to lead a regional development bank, Adesina’s recognition as the 2017 World Food Prize Laureate will give impetus to his profound vision for enhancing nutrition, eliminating childhood stunting, uplifting smallholder farmers, empowering women, and inspiring the next generation of young Africans to confront the unprecedented challenges of the 21st century. For all of these achievements, 2002 World Food Prize Laureate Dr. Pedro Sanchez has described Adesina as “Africa’s Norman Borlaug.”

In looking to the future, our 2017 Laureate has said that, having grown up in poverty, his life’s mission is to “lift millions of people out of poverty, especially farmers in rural Africa.” Embracing Adesina’s goal during one of the most critical moments in Africa’s history, the theme for our Borlaug Dialogue last October was “The Road out of Poverty.” During that symposium, Adesina and his team unveiled plans to greatly expand agricultural production on

the African Savannah and identify “Technologies for African Agricultural Transformation.”

On the evening of October 19, 2017, Adesina was presented our World Food Prize Laureate sculpture at an extremely moving ceremony in the magnificent Iowa State Capitol, with former African presidents Olesegun Obasanjo of Nigeria and John Harama of Ghana joining in the formal presentation. With guests from over 50 countries in the audience, the event was a great celebration of the achievements of Adesina and all those involved in African Development, as well as the legacy of Borlaug and all World Food Prize Laureates.

In his acceptance remarks, Adesina received a standing ovation when he announced that he was donating his entire \$250,000 prize to fund scholarships for aspiring African students. He made a second announcement, making public his commitment to establishing a World Food Prize Africa Youth Institute for high school age students in his home country of Nigeria. World Food Prize Chairman John Ruan III was so taken with Adesina’s initiative that he announced a personal \$100,000 contribution to support his vision.

The legacy continues

When I completed my tenure as U.S. Ambassador to Cambodia and retired from my diplomatic career at the State Department in 1999, I returned home to Iowa to assume leadership of the World Food Prize. At that time, the roster of World Food Prize Laureates did not include any women, nor any recipients from Latin America or Africa. I am extremely proud that the aggregation of Laureates has expanded during the past 18 years to now include six women, six individuals from Latin America, and with Adesina, six Africans.



Adesina promoting a new vision in agriculture with women.

For 31 years, the World Food Prize has worked to build on the legacy of Norman Borlaug, “the man who saved a billion lives;” by recognizing the achievements of individuals who have advanced human development by improving the quality, quantity, and availability of food in the world. Our Laureates work tirelessly to alleviate hunger through innovative approaches. Indeed, World Food Prize Laureates have been at the forefront of almost every significant agricultural breakthrough during this period: from the development of the milk industry in India to the miracle rice perfected at the International Rice Research Institute in the Philippines; from the reform of China’s agricultural policies to eliminating the cattle plague rinderpest; from the United Nations delivering emergency food shipments around the globe to eradicating the deadly screwworm infestation in the United States; and from expanding modern irrigation in Israel, Jordan, and the Middle East to discovering and unlocking the incredible potential of agricultural biotechnology.

Having been at the forefront of African agricultural development, Akinwumi Adesina, President of the African Development Bank, is the newest member of this proud tradition. Adesina joins a distinguished array of scientists, policymakers, innovators, and global leaders who have received the World Food Prize.

My hope is that all members of ASABE will review the information at www.worldfood-prize.org/nominate and then submit a nomination for an individual from your discipline whose breakthrough achievements have diminished hunger, poverty, and malnutrition by increasing the quality, quantity, and availability of food in the world.

Ambassador Kenneth M. Quinn (ret.), President, The World Food Prize, Des Moines, Iowa, USA, kquinn@worldfoodprize.org, www.worldfoodprize.org.



Adesina using the E-Wallet system with Nigerian farmers.