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# Connecting Three Countries in the Battle Against Hunger

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Sometimes in life, there are moments worth celebrating, when everything comes full circle.

Today was one of those rare days.

Picture a globe. Then draw a few lines on it — one stretching between the United States and Mexico, and one between Mexico and India. To tell the full story, you would also need to draw a billion other little lines, everywhere.

That first line represents the incredible journey that began when the United States and the Rockefeller Foundation in the 1940s sent a team of agricultural scientists — including Iowa's Dr. Norman Borlaug — to Mexico to study wheat, improve its yields and build its resistance to disease. Working together with local farmers, Borlaug and his contemporaries tackled problems of huge magnitude, worked tirelessly to cross-breed new types of wheat, and eventually started a revolution in food and agriculture: The Green Revolution.

Borlaug took new wheat varieties that were high-yielding and resistant to rust disease to India and Pakistan, where people faced imminent starvation. He convinced political leaders to invest in agriculture, infrastructure, training and seeds, and he set to work, ultimately saving a billion lives through his efforts. For his advancements, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970, and he went on to work his entire life to battle hunger in numerous regions of the world.

Now follow the line backwards from India to Mexico. This line represents the life of Dr. Sanjaya Rajaram. Like Borlaug, Dr. Rajaram grew up in a small farming community, although his was half a world away, in India. At a time when 96 percent of rural children lacked education, his parents recognized something in him, sent him to school five kilometers away each day, and he rose to the top of every class. From his upbringing, Dr. Rajaram had seen people living each day with very little, and he became passionate about doing work that could make a real difference.

He was recruited to the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) in Mexico, where he would meet his mentor, Norman Borlaug, and eventually succeed

him as head of the wheat breeding program. He went on to expand upon Borlaug's ideas and in some ways surpass his work, developing an astounding 480 new varieties of wheat that could grow in various climactic and soil conditions around the globe, thus providing a nutritious food source for millions of people.

On Wednesday, June 18, I had the distinct honor of standing next to U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry at the U.S. State Department and naming Dr. Rajaram the 2014 World Food Prize Laureate. His line from Mexico to the United States will jolt across the country from Washington, D.C., to Iowa, the birthplace of Borlaug. There, the journey will be complete on October 16 as Dr. Rajaram formally receives the World Food Prize, which was founded by Dr. Borlaug himself to shine a spotlight each year on breakthroughs in agriculture that are improving the world's food supply and combatting the scourge of hunger.

It is difficult to impress upon people the impact these men have had. Consider Dr. Borlaug: Statues of his likeness now exist in all three of these countries, put up by a wide array of people who knew, loved and respected him. Farmers in Obregón erected a statue of him, which was a huge honor, given the many years he worked in extremely rough, rural conditions with them. Scientists and researchers placed his statue at the National Indian Agricultural Complex in Delhi, India. And in March, he was enshrined in the U.S. Capitol — the most significant governmental building in our country — by his home state of Iowa.

I know Dr. Borlaug is smiling down on us today, as we continue his legacy and celebrate the real-life heroes who toil in the field to provide food for the rest of us. So often, these heroes go unsung.

But, you see, there is a very real need to hold them up as our examples, to support their important work, and to inspire the next generation to emulate them.

One hundred years ago, when Dr. Borlaug was born, the global population was about 1.8 billion people. Today, it is 7 billion. By the year 2050, it is expected to reach 9 billion. Currently, 1 in 8 people is hungry, and does not have enough food to eat. In an age where we have smartphone computers in our pockets at all times, a need so basic does not seem right. And indeed it was Dr. Borlaug who said, "Food is the moral right of all who are born into this world."

This fall, the World Food Prize will celebrate Dr. Rajaram, and during the same week, Oct. 15-17, we will hold the annual Borlaug Dialogue international symposium to explore cutting-edge issues in food security. This year's theme is fitting, I believe, as we celebrate the Borlaug Centennial Year and look ahead to the future. We will explore "The Greatest Challenge in Human History: Can We Sustainably Feed the 9 Billion People on our Planet in 2050?"

I invite everyone who has an interest in food security to tune in to the critical issues and discussions ahead. Because, as another of our esteemed World Food Prize Laureates has said, “If you eat, you are a stakeholder.”

