

## Extending a Wheat Sheaf for Peace

In 1959, at the height of the nuclear tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev made an unprecedented visit to America, eventually ending up on the farm of Roswell Garst near Coon Rapids, Iowa. The Soviet leader and his host spent considerable time admiring the impressive ears of corn that Garst was able to grow with the enhanced seeds that his company produced.

This exchange led to a series of visits to the Soviet Union over the next four decades by the unofficial ambassador of American agriculture John Chrystal, Garst's nephew,

famine, starvation and death in India and Pakistan in the 1960s. Special events honoring Borlaug have included the unveiling of his statue in the U.S. Capitol, a weeklong celebration in Mexico, festivities in Uganda, as well as in India and Pakistan. But I was amazed to learn that the Iranians had enormous respect for Borlaug and especially for his advocacy of biotechnology. In fact, the Iranian Ministry of Agriculture had given him a special gold medal in 2000 reflecting his enormous achievements.

This past August I addressed approximately 400 Iranian agricultural scientists who were gathered for the 13th Iran Crop

award. That year it was especially clear that agriculture and food production can be the catalyst for enhancing understanding between two peoples.

It was with that possibility in mind that I extended an invitation to the Minister of Agriculture of Iran to select a scientist to attend The World Food Prize and participate in a panel discussion on wheat and hopefully enhance the cooperation taking place in confronting the virulent Ug99 rust disease which has affected both Iranian and American wheat crops.

I am pleased to say that the usual 6–8 month visa process for Iranians was telescoped into just a 6-week timeframe. This permitted Goodarz Najafian, Director General of the Plant Improvement Institute of Iran, to arrive in Des Moines on October 13, just in time to have productive exchanges with American scientists and also to speak at our Borlaug Dialogue symposium.

When he walked off the plane at the Des Moines airport, Najafian said that it was his profound hope that his visit would be the beginning of other larger and more significant scientific exchanges between the two countries.

With the goal of reducing tension, enhancing the possibility of an effective nuclear accord and to diminish the violent ISIS movement, it would, indeed, seem that this is the moment for an expanded set of visits and interactions on agriculture and food technology, through The World Food Prize and other international organizations such as the IFT.

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and to expanded agricultural cooperation between the two countries. While not directly related to the nuclear issue, these exchanges created an atmosphere of reduced tension and increased trust which helped to set the stage for future nuclear negotiations and led to weapons reductions and enhanced safeguards against the outbreak of cataclysmic military conflict.

It was with this history in mind that I accepted the invitation from the Agricultural Biotechnology Research Institute of Iran in July 2014 asking me to speak at a celebration that the institute was holding to honor Norman E. Borlaug, the late Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and Father of the Green Revolution who was also the founder of The World Food Prize Foundation that I now lead.

This past year has been one of special recognition for Borlaug as it marked the 100th anniversary of his birth on March 25, 1914. Borlaug, who developed miracle wheat in Mexico in the 1940s and 1950s, was credited with saving hundreds of millions from

Science Congress. I shared with that audience not only the story of Khrushchev and Garst but also of Iowan Herbert Hoover taking food to feed the children of the Soviet Union in the 1920s, and Iowa farmers shipping 36 of their best hogs to Japan to help restock the animal industry in Yamanashi province, which had been disseminated by a typhoon not long after WWII. All are examples of how confronting hunger can bring people together even across the broadest cultural, ethnic, religious or diplomatic differences.

The World Food Prize has become a global stage that often emphasizes this point. I shared with the audience in Iran the image of Israeli scientist Daniel Hillel receiving the 2012 World Food Prize, having been nominated for this highest honor by individuals from three separate Arab countries. There is a dramatic picture of Hillel with the Secretary General of the United Nations and an Arab princess and sheikh applauding him at the Iowa State Capitol as he accepted the

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