



*[Photo taken in St. Louis 9/17/2012](#)*

## World Food Prize Activities Incites Occupy Protest In Iowa

By DAVID PITT 10/17/12 07:19 PM

**DES MOINES, Iowa** — It's difficult to argue with the goals of the World Food Prize Foundation — to recognize people who have helped improve the quality and availability of food to reduce world hunger.

But as the Des Moines-based foundation prepares for its 2012 award ceremony, which will be attended by dignitaries including Secretary-General of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon, dozens of protesters hope to disrupt the activities.

Members of Occupy Des Moines plan civil disobedience efforts and expect to be arrested as they obstruct participants at the World Food Prize headquarters on Wednesday and at the Iowa Capitol on Thursday before the \$250,000 prize is awarded to this year's recipient.

Organizer Frank Cordaro said he expected about 30 people to turn out Wednesday, with 10 willing to be arrested. By Wednesday afternoon, police arrested five activists on trespassing charges after they tried to enter a private event.

The group opposes what it sees as a focus on corporate agriculture motivated more by profit than food safety or protection of natural resources.

“The prize is corporate agriculture’s way of branding themselves in the minds of the American people as the good guys, the people who are feeding the hungry and the best last chance the human race has to meet our basic needs,” said Cordaro, 61, a former Roman Catholic priest who’s been jailed numerous times for acts of civil disobedience to social issues. “The truth is the prize is owned and scripted for corporate agriculture and large corporate entities who want to make a profit first and don’t really care about the planet.”

The protesters say the foundation also supports organizations that promote and sell crops that include genetically modified organisms, known as GMOs. While many scientists say genetic modification has been useful in developing crops resistant to pests, drought and disease, opponents worry it could result in harm to the environment or people.

World Food Prize Foundation President Kenneth Quinn, a retired career diplomat and Foreign Service officer for the U.S. Government, said he's dealt with a variety of protests in his career, but he's puzzled that people would object to an organization founded by a man who won a Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to fight hunger. Norman Borlaug was honored in 1970 for work that boosted agricultural production in what has become known as the "Green Revolution."

"I'm greatly disappointed that people would feel that his organization and his prize that he created, his goal of ending hunger in the world would somehow be worthy of disruption and civil disobedience," Quinn said.

The prize created in 1986 has grown in stature in recent years, with hundreds of scholars and agribusiness leaders gathering for several days in Des Moines for speeches and seminars. Last year, the private, nonprofit foundation moved to the former Des Moines Public Library after a \$30 million renovation paid in part with donations from companies including DuPont and Cargill.

Speakers from Monsanto Co., Bayer CropScience, and Syngenta have been invited to participate in events this week.

DuPont Pioneer spokeswoman Jane Slusark said the company respects protesters' right to voice their opinions, but to fight hunger, "it's going to take all of us working together, even if we do not always agree."

Spokesmen for Monsanto and Syngenta also defended their companies' efforts to develop technologies that boost crop production. Syngenta spokesman Paul Minehart said scientists have turned to genetic modification and other biotechnologies to boost food production as the world's population increases.

"We don't have more land and we don't have more water that can be used efficiently and effectively for agriculture, so how are you going to be able to feed this growing population with limited resources?" Minehart asked. "We're trying to make sure we are providing farmers what they need to be able to get the most yield and have the most productive crops that they can."

Noting that "Dr. Borlaug believed in science," Quinn said a panel discussion on biotechnology was planned this week because food production may depend on it as climate change brings more cycles of drought and flooding.

Ironically, while the protesters and some panels will focus on biotechnology and other facets of agribusiness, the winner of this year's prize is being celebrated for low-tech work.

Israeli scientist Daniel Hillel, 81, helped develop drip irrigation methods that conserve water while allowing food to be grown in some of the world's driest climates. The system Hillel developed, called micro-irrigation, carries water through narrow plastic pipes to plants, where it trickles continuously onto the roots. Over decades, it has dramatically improved farm production and helped thousands of Jewish and Muslim farmers.

Like some of those protesting the prize, Hillel has been concerned with preserving natural resources.

"We need to learn how to manage land so that it will not degrade and do it efficiently. At the same time, we must maintain natural ecosystems without encroaching upon them without excessive deforestation and destruction of biodiversity," he told The Associated Press in a June interview when he was announced as this year's winner.

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Source: [Huffington Post](#)

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