



# More visibility sought for World Food Prize

Quinn uses advertising at Millennium Summit as part of new strategy

By JERRY PERKINS  
REGISTER FARM EDITOR

**J**ohn Ruan selected Dubuque native Kenneth Quinn a year ago to be president of the World Food Prize Foundation for two reasons: visibility and prestige.

During the 14 years since the Food Prize was established, the \$250,000 annual award has failed to draw the world-wide attention that Ruan and others believe it deserves.

"Our big aim is to get the World Food Prize known around the world and he has the connections," Ruan said of Quinn.

Quinn, 58, spent 32 years as a U.S. State Department diplomat, but his assignments led more to ducking bullets than schmoozing at embassy socials.

He was wounded in Vietnam, bombed in Cambodia, targeted by terrorists in the Philippines and attacked at the Gaza Strip.

"I've now been shot at, blown up or wounded in every Foreign Service assignment I've had," Quinn once said of his diplomatic service.

Since taking over the Food Prize program, Quinn moved the announcement of the prize from Washington to Des Moines and will take the Prize on the road to New York.

An ambitious advertising campaign also was launched last week to attract attention during the "Millennium Summit" at the United Nations. The three-day summit

## Kenneth Quinn

Age: 58

Position: President, World Food Prize Foundation

Education: Graduate of Dubuque Wahlert High School Loras College; master's degree from Marquette University; Ph. D. in International Relations from University of Maryland.

Career: U.S. State Department, 1967-99; special assistant to Gov. Robert Ray, 1978-82.

Family: Wife, Le Son; two sons and a daughter.

brought kings, presidents, prime ministers and other dignitaries from 189 nations to New York, where advertisements in New York media touted the World Food Prize.

Quinn also hopes to attract attention by tackling the controversial issue of genetically modified crops during the annual symposium that accompanies the awarding of the World Food Prize in Des Moines.

This year's symposium, to be held Oct. 12-13, has the theme: "The Safety of Genetically Modified Crops and Their Role in Feeding Developing Countries in the 21st Century."

"This theme fits in with Gov. Vilsack's vision of making Iowa the 'World Food Capital,'" Quinn said. "We won't take sides. We'll just



**Food Prize leaders:** Kenneth Quinn, left, president of the World Food Prize Foundation, and John Ruan view the World Food Prize award. Ruan selected Quinn for the position a year ago. Quinn is a native of Dubuque.



Vasal Villegas

## Corn experts winners for 2000

**E**vangelina Villegas of Mexico and Surinder Vasal of India will receive the 2000 World Food Prize for their collaboration in developing corn varieties known as Quality Protein Maize.

The \$250,000 prize will be presented Oct. 12 at the Iowa State Capitol and at a luncheon Oct. 16 in New York City.

Quality Protein Maize has about 90 percent of the protein value found in skim milk and twice the protein found in conventional corn varieties. It is grown on 2½ million acres, mostly in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The corn has yields equal to conventional corn and has processing qualities that make it palatable to hundreds of millions of people who eat corn as a dietary staple.

The protein-enhanced corn also improves the growth of livestock, especially pigs and chickens.

Villegas, 75, and Vasal, 62, worked together for three decades to develop Quality Protein Maize at the International Center for the Improvement of Corn and Wheat in Mexico.

MARY CHIND/REGISTER PHOTOS



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provide the forum."

Quinn used his diplomatic connections to attract an international "Who's Who" of agricultural and food policy experts.

Symposium speakers include the German Minister of Agriculture, Karl Heinz-Funke; Swedish scientist Ingo Potrykus, who had his photo on the cover of TIME magazine for his role developing genetically-engineered "golden rice"; and U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's most senior advisor on biotechnology, Ambassador Alan Larson.

Other speakers are coming from China, Australia, India, Denmark and Canada. Both sides of the controversy will be represented at the symposium, he said.

Quinn wants to turn the annual Des Moines symposium into "one of the top policy dialogues in the world," he said. "I will promise that one of the greatest delegations of agricultural talent ever assembled will be present."

That delegation includes the 11 former World Food Prize laureates who will return to Des Moines for the symposium and to attend ceremonies honoring the two new recipients of the prize.

After the Des Moines events, the World Food Prize activities will travel to New York City, where a luncheon at the Rainbow Room for

the United Nations' diplomatic corps will feature U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman and Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, the U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations.

Kofi Anan, secretary general of the U.N., has been invited as special guest of honor.

"We're trying to spread the word that this is a big deal and a prestigious event," Quinn said.

It has long frustrated leaders of the World Food Prize that the award attracts so little attention outside of Iowa.

"When I left the State Department, people asked what I was going to do and when I told them, nobody had heard of the World Food Prize," Quinn said.

The World Food Prize was founded by Norman Borlaug, the Iowa native who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970 for his work developing new strains of wheat that prevented famine in India and Pakistan in the 1960s.

Borlaug thought there should be an award equal in stature to the Nobel Prize that honored those who worked to increase the quality, quantity and availability of food in the world. He convinced General Foods to sponsor the prize, but a change in corporate ownership led the company to drop out.

Des Moines businessman John Ruan was asked by Borlaug to pick up the award's sponsorship. Ruan

agreed and formed his World Food Foundation, which has sponsored the award since 1990.

In 1997, Ruan donated \$10 million to permanently endow the foundation.

Another one of Quinn's goals is to expand the reach of World Food Prize Youth Institute established in 1994 to increase awareness of world food issues among Iowa high school students.

Assisted by the Iowa Council for International Understanding, the foundation selects a group of Iowa high school students to present papers on world food issues to the laureates the day after the symposium.

"We ought to make this into the Global Youth Institute and reach out to other states and countries," Quinn said. "That would help put Des Moines on the map and help make Iowa the World Food Capital."

Quinn also wants to expand the Youth Institute's summer internship program.

The program sends students to research centers around the world for eight weeks during summer to work on projects.

Perhaps, Quinn said, the Youth Institute can develop another Norman Borlaug who can stave off famine with hard work and good science.

For Quinn, returning to Iowa to work on world food issues is

## Past winners of the World Food Prize

The World Food Prize, based in Des Moines, is sponsored by the World Food Foundation. Past winners are:

**1999** — Walter Plowright, for developing a vaccine that eliminated rinderpest, commonly known as cattle plague, from many regions of the developing world.

**1998** — B. R. Barwale, for helping develop the private seed industry in India.

**1997** — Ray Smith and Perry Adkisson, for pioneering the concept of integrated pest management.

**1996** — Henry Beachell and Gurdev Khush, for directing improvements in rice varieties.

**1995** — Hans Herren, for biologically controlling the mealybug, a pest of Africa's cassava crop.

**1994** — Muhammad Yunus, for founding the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh and its small loan

programs for the poor.

**1993** — He Kang, former Minister of Agriculture for China, for leadership in boosting food production.

**1992** — Edward Knipling and Raymond Bushland, for controlling insect parasites.

**1991** — Nevin Scrimshaw, for developing low-cost, protein-rich foods.

**1990** — John Niederhauser, for discovering resistance to potato leaf blight.

**1989** — Verghese Kurien, for organizing production, processing and marketing dairy cooperatives in India.

**1988** — Robert Chandler Jr., for founding the International Rice Institute.

**1987** — M.S. Swaminathan, for introducing high-yielding wheat and rice in India.

coming full circle.

As a 25-year-old Foreign Service officer in the mid-1960s, he was sent to the Mekong Delta in Vietnam to work on rural development projects in the villages.

"Back in Iowa, I feel like I'm

working on issues that affect those villages," Quinn said. "I'm lucky to be able to keep discovering how I can continue to make a difference."

Farm Editor Jerry Perkins can be reached at (515) 284-8456 or [perkinsj@news.dmreg.com](mailto:perkinsj@news.dmreg.com)