

THE WORLD FOOD PRIZE

**Remarks by
Ambassador Kenneth M. Quinn
Global Harvest Initiative
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In October of this year, hundreds of individuals from more than 65 countries will travel to Des Moines for the World Food Prize, both to memorialize Norm and to participate in the International Symposium he created, which we now call the Borlaug Dialogue. This will be the first one that Norm ever missed.

Our topic this year is Food, Agriculture and National Security. The international community faces daunting challenges that directly impact what countries perceive as their national security, with the potential for conflict and violence. But there is also a remarkable opportunity for Agriculture and development to play a role in promoting peace and security. The key issues to be addressed include:

Will food shortages or increased prices disrupt our globalized food distribution system, thus leading to possible internal violence or direct conflict between countries?

As was demonstrated in 2008, the globalized agricultural and food supply network which has been developed can quickly become fragile and even disrupted when subjected to the stress of reductions in yields, sharp increases in prices and/or climatic shifts (even if only temporary in nature). As World Bank President Bob Zoellick noted at the World Food Prize Symposium in 2008 “When the food crisis hit agricultural markets around the world, they started to break down! Over 40 countries started export bans or export restrictions.” He concluded that the basic question is: how can we manage the risk?

What is the role of agriculture and infrastructure in defusing internal strife within a country?

Can new seeds and new roads be a critical factor in reducing conflict within a country when it is suffering from tribal or ethnic conflict as in Sudan? Ambassador Richard Williamson, the US Presidential envoy on Darfur during the Bush administration, pointed out that those areas of Sudan so drastically affected by violence have fewer than 5 kilometers of paved roads.

Are agriculture and improved roads an effective means of dealing with the threats posed by the Al-Qaida and the Taliban in Afghanistan,

As a young diplomat assigned to rural development work in the 1960s, I saw that the combination of upgraded rural roads and new high yielding miracle rice seeds could play

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a defining role in defeating insurgencies in Mekong Delta. Twenty five years later, we used that same approach to destroy the genocidal Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. My former boss Ambassador Dick Holbrooke and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack would argue that agriculture is just as important now in Afghanistan. Last September, Defense Secretary Bob Gates said: All of my commanders in Afghanistan tell me the same thing: “Where the road ends, the insurgency begins.”

Norman Borlaug is no longer with us, but his sense of the critical linkage between agricultural innovations and rural infrastructure will remain a key part of his enduring legacy. Whether it is understanding that it was the Erie Canal that brought John Deere to the Midwest, or the new farm-to-market roads in Iowa that permitted the distribution of Henry Wallace’s hybrid corn, the relationship of technology and the transportation network that spreads it, is what stood out to Norm as the critical factors in bringing prosperity to the poorest areas.

It may be Dr. Norman E. Borlaug’s most enduring legacy that his miracle wheat and the rural roads which spread the Green Revolution through Mexico, India and Pakistan over 40 years ago, is still the most potent resource the international community has in the 21st century to bring peaceful transitions to societies in Asia and the Middle East, thwarting terrorism in Afghanistan, bringing the Green Revolution to Africa and providing a global economic stimulus while helping reduce hunger and malnutrition around the globe.

This combination is also at the heart of success of the four companies which have worked together to launch the Global Harvest Initiative. The Global Harvest Initiative could not come at a more critical moment.