

2011 THE "BORLAUG DIALOGUE"

October 14, 2011 - 12:30 p.m.

Laureate Luncheon Keynote Speaker: John Agyekum Kufuor

LAUREATE LUNCHEON KEYNOTE

Introduction by:

Ambassador Kenneth Quinn

President - World Food Prize Foundation

I hope everybody enjoyed your lunch, and, please, let's give a round of applause to the hotel, wonderful work, food all week long. Thank you so much.

Reminder again - right afterwards the AGRA reception in the Council Bluffs Room, there to congratulate President Kufuor on his remarks, for Jeanie Borlaug and the Borlaug family who is here.

There's a new book by Noel Vietmeyer about her Dad, and it's got the story. Now, he had it in three volumes and you had to buy all three and they were big and bulky, but now here's the condensed version, so it's great to have this. And he's still out here and has got a bunch of books left, so you might be able to bargain with. Don't tell him I said that, but maybe you can bargain with him to get a good deal.

And one other bit of business is that all of these events that have gone on all week, so many people have come up to me and say how wonderful it is, how much they enjoyed being here, how engaging they found the discussions and the ceremony, and how welcome they were made to feel, coming here, and complimented me on how well organized it all was.

And I, of course, am happy to receive such compliments, but, you know, my Mom and Dad taught me I had to be honest, and so what I want to tell you all today is that, to the extent that you found anything good, excellent, engaging, welcoming, it's the result of an immense amount of hard work, of planning, of attention to detail, of incredibly long hours. And I am blessed to have an immediate staff of people that work with me year around.

We have interns who are in our office, we have interns who used to be in our office and who take off from school or their jobs, and they come. They get on planes and fly from Colorado and Florida and New York and Ohio, and they get on buses and ride here. And they have an incredible dedication to Dr. Borlaug, to the World Food Prize, and they're there.

If you went into my office - this is the honest to God truth - if you went in there any day, Monday through Friday, Saturday, Sunday, for the last month or more and come in anytime,

one, two o'clock in the morning, three o'clock in the morning, there'd be somebody there working. And they'd be back the next morning. They're all over here, and I want you to join with me in thanking them for all that they did in making this possible. My old friend, Ed Redburn (where's Ed?) is over here. Ed came back this year. He comes back and steps in, because I have to sort of get my external role, and directs things.

But everyone here - and there are a number who are not here who had to start going back to school or things - but please join with me and thanking them for their dedication and their compliments.

And now I revert to my old form and get back to work, okay? Can't be too soft, right, no. That's wonderful.

Well, this is the culminating event, and how appropriate it is to have our other rock star of the week. You know, to have President Lula da Silva, President Kufuor, you're a great team, and I think everybody here will remember that scene last night of the two of you embraced together there in the well as you received the Prize and that sense of moral partnership, of having done what you each did in your own country. But it was so symbolic of the example that the two of you have set, because coming from very different circumstances, and it's so amazing what each in your own way you did.

And having been to Ghana just a little over a year ago and having seen for myself, I came away with the most profound respect for you. And now having gotten to know you and have you here and have you as a member of our family as a World Food Prize Laureate gives us incredible honor.

And again, I could read the President's bio and read all where he was. You saw in the video last night how he got where he is. All you need to know as I introduce him is that he is the 2000 World Food Prize Laureate, His Excellency, President John Kufuor.

LAUREATE LUNCHEON KEYNOTE

John Agyekum Kufuor, 2011 World Food Prize Laureate and former President, Ghana

Thank you. Ambassador Quinn, the Borlaug and Ruan families, colleagues from our presidents, colleague laureates, excellencies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen. I want to begin by thanking Ambassador Quinn for kind words about me. The first time I have had myself described as a, what, a star?

[Ambassador Quinn - A rock star.]

A rock star. First time ever in my life. But if you are the friend of Lula, then very likely the spirit of the adage of, "Show me your friend; I show you your character." Lula definitely is a star so thank you for that.

I want to begin by saying how grateful I am that the selection committee considered me worthy of this tremendous honor. I'm all too aware of the roll call of distinguished former Prize winners and their individual contributions to tackling world hunger. Few people in humanity's history can match the lives they have saved and transformed. And I'm incredibly honored to join this list.

I also feel especially privileged to share the prize in this 25th year, the silver jubilee year of the Prize, with President Lula of Brazil. His achievements have highlighted the crucial importance of tackling poverty and driving development and equity.

Countries all over the world are learning from the successful and environmentally sustainable farming policies followed in Brazil during President Lula's presidency. We are grateful in Africa that he has established an outpost of Brazil's world famous Agricultural Research Institute (EMBRAPA) in Ghana during my presidency to force collaboration and spread best practice.

But as important was President Lula's determination to ensure the fruits of agricultural process provided a platform for a modern, prosperous and just society for all around the globe. Under his leadership, Brazil came of age and became a model for development and a powerful voice for justice in our world. I'm proud to have been chosen alongside him for this year's Prize.

Ladies and gentlemen, it was of course to highlight the link between food and development and to celebrate the achievements of those whose contribution helped food security that this Prize was set up. Norman Borlaug, having done so much himself to tackle hunger, was determined to encourage others to pick up the baton.

Thanks in no small part to the efforts of those you have honored and the encouragement you have given to those working across the field, the world has seen many remarkable advancements. New crops and new techniques have revolutionized yields – the advances in scientific knowledge that I believe delights Dr. Borlaug and his friend, John Ruan Senior, and those who had the vision to set up and support the Prize a generation ago.

Yet I suspect, too, that this would be coupled with a profound disappointment that so little progress has been made in reducing the numbers of humanity still living in hunger. Far from it being banished, famine continues to destroy hundreds of thousands of lives and livelihoods around the world, as we are now seeing in Somalia and other parts of the Horn of Africa.

Indeed, growing populations, rising food prices and the impact of the global financial crisis means that the numbers growing hungry are again rising. It seems likely that over one billion people, one in seven of the planet's population, may not have enough food to eat today.

As this audience knows that this figure, shameful as it is, is by no means the whole story, for there are many hundreds of millions more who, while not hungry, suffer the damaging impact of consistently poor diets. They may have food on the table, but their meals do not supply the nutrition necessary to maintain their health and well-being.

Climate change, which the world has failed to find the courage or vision to tackle, is suddenly making these problems worse in many parts of the world. So too is our failure to invest in family planning services. It is, of course, the young and already vulnerable who pay the heaviest personal price for our failures.

But the impacts and costs is a huge brake on progress and prosperity. If pregnant women do not eat healthily, the physical and mental development of their unborn children are damaged, often irreversibly. Malnutrition stunts our children's growth, increases the vulnerability to disease and reduces their capacity to learn at school. And of course all this feeds through into the wider economy with increased healthcare costs and decreased productivity and growth.

Without meeting the needs of families for food, we cannot meet our wide ambitions for our worlds.

So given the advances in knowledge, which this Prize ourselves encourage, why is it the world continues to fail to meet this most basic of needs? It is not through any lack of will or effort by those who produce the food.

Farming in many parts of the developing world is an exhausting, back-breaking, unreformed, dawn-to-dusk efforts with too little reward. It is why it holds so little attraction to the better-educated, younger generation – one of the many challenges we face in transforming food production over the long term.

Instead of using their energy and education to improve agriculture, they would rather drift to the towns where there are few jobs, and frustrations build. Yet, the Food and Agricultural Organization still estimates that half of all the hungry people in developing countries are farming families. They live all too often on marginal lands where the agriculture crops are constantly vulnerable to pests, diseases, floods and drought.

For them, the new techniques, crop varieties and pest and disease controls, which farmers in the developed worlds take for granted, may well have never been developed. But if you can link these farmers with this new technology and provide them with the support that allows them to make full use of it, the results can be truly remarkable.

This was our government's strategy in Ghana when I was elected to lead the country in the year 2000. Agriculture remains the mainstay of the country, accounting for 35 percent of its GDP, 55 percent of employment, and 75 percent of its export revenue. Indeed, around 60 percent of our country's population derives its livelihood from the land.

But agriculture was suffering, like the country as a whole, from decades of neglect and lack of investment.

At the beginning of the 21st century, agriculture in Ghana, as is still the case across much of Africa, had changed little from that practice generations ago. Farmers were still scratching a living from the land by hand, like the ancestors used to do. Crops were overwhelmingly rainfed. If the rains failed, something becoming all too frequent with climate change, the crops failed. Even if the rains come at the time and intensity expected, pests and diseases devastated harvests. There was little use of pesticides, fertilizers and machinery.

The same crops were grown year after year, reducing the fertility of the land. It forces families to move on, slashing to burning, causing severe and lasting damage to our environment. Now it is as little as 7 percent. Our precious environment has been destroyed to provide land for farming and timber at a low cost for the developed world.

Even when crops were harvested, we continued to see mid-year losses. Poor storage and poor transport meant much of the harvest would be wasted. The failure of agriculture meant millions were going hungry. Declining export revenues were being used to import food, which only helped to drive down prices for our own crops. It was often food of such poor quality that it could not find a market where it was produced and exported.

This was a picture which was by no means restricted to Ghana. Much of Africa is still suffering from the absence of what my friend Kofi Annan calls Africa's own Green Revolution. But what's clear from our experience is that if you give the farmers the knowledge and tools, they will repair this damage through their own hard work.

This is the priority my government agreed on: to put transforming agriculture at the heart of our ambitions to transform our country. Ghana was already the second-biggest exporter of cocoa in the world in the year 2000, but we believed that by adopting the latest knowledge from universities, agricultural institutions, experts and working farmers and the reservoir of knowledge, we could really increase yields.

Thus, cocoa farms were sprayed with pesticides free of charge, subsidies were provided for fertilizers and capital investments were made easier and cheaper to obtain. We also made sure farmers were going to be rewarded for their hard work in increasing yields. So we increased from 40 to 70 percent the share that was given to them from the export prices of their produce.

Within three years, cocoa production per hectare doubled in Ghana. Production also increased from 350,000 tons in the year 2001 to 734,000 tons by the year 2005 - the highest level in over a hundred years of cocoa farming in Ghana.

I am pleased to say production has continued to increase, and last year topped one million tons, virtually tripling in just a decade. These improvements were not restricted, however, to cocoa, important as the crop is to the country's future. Strategy deployed extension services became critical and invaluable.

Using the same techniques, cereal production increased by 37 percent between 2000 and 2008 compared to just 1.9 percent between 1993 and the year 2000. Yam and cassava yields also increased by 42 percent over the same period.

More land was brought into cultivation and irrigation was enhanced for small- and medium-size farms, particularly in the grasslands in the north of the country. We encouraged farmers to diversify into cash crops, such as nuts, cashew nuts, mangos and sorghum, which brought in extra export revenues for farmers in our country.

High-quality seeds and planting materials were provided by the Grains and Legumes Development Board with the government strengthening. There was an increase as well in livestock production, while the steps we took to modernize fisheries and introduce agriculture made a difference to many communities. And I'm happy we've been treated to a tilapia lunch, because it happens to be the most popular fish in Ghana today.

We invested, too, in wider rural developments. There is little point in increasing yields if crops are not stored safely or transported to markets. So we built feeder roads, silos and cold storage for crops and fish respectively. Rural electrification, upgraded healthcare centers, potable water supply, and quality schools were also integral to the agricultural policy.

We implemented free compulsory universal basic education under which all children between the ages of 4 and 15 attend school at the expense of the state. Health insurance, including free maternal care for pregnant women, was for the first time introduced in Ghana, with over 60 percent rate coverage by the time we were leaving office.

Ladies and gentlemen, none of these advances or techniques was new, and none by themselves would help produce the results we have seen. But by bringing them together in a determined and coordinated way, we transformed the production of foods within our country. It was a truly integrated approach with central government setting the framework and providing support but working with partners right across the country.

What are the other problems Ghana faces? It went for a situation where it did not fail to produce enough food to a healthy position where food was plentiful even during the financial and economic crisis around the world.

It also made sure that this food got into the mouths of those who decide our country's future. That's an ambitious program. The school feeding program was launched to give kindergarten and primary school pupils one daily hot, nutritious meal made from locally produced food in a number of districts around the country as a pilot scheme, of course with the ambition to replicate across the whole country.

Initially we covered about 600,000 people. Currently, I believe a million children are enjoying this facility. This helped both farmers and our children and those who provided jobs for women in the local community who cook the meals.

The provision of good food has not only ensured existing pupils turn up for classes and stay in education, it also led to many more parents deciding to send their children, and in particular their daughters, to school, which will have an important positive impact on Ghana over the long term.

In the first year of implementation, primary school enrollment went up by about 40 percent. The benefits of education for girls are felt in everything from a fall in teenage pregnancies to healthier families and increased economic growth.

So just as the government hoped, the transformation of agriculture has helped transform our country's prospects. The number of people living in poverty fell from 40 percent in 1999 to 26 percent in the year 2008. Those who were undernourished fell by a similar proportion. Ghana, seven years ahead of schedule, became the first Sub-Saharan African country to meet its Millennium Development Goals target of halving extreme poverty and hunger.

Indeed, national reserves quadrupled with GDP growing by 8.4 percent in the year 2008 when the rest of the world were toppling with their GDP growth rates. Our country, according to multilateral organizations, also made the transition to middle-income status by the year 2008.

It is also a nation now widely seen as a beacon of democracy and stability within our continent where human rights and the rule of law are respected. Underpinning this dramatic growth was the pursuit of good governance, respect for human rights, and the abolition of criminal laws that had been in place for the previous hundred years that inhibited free speech and freedom of association.

Ladies and gentlemen, I retell this story of achievements not (and I have to hasten to add) to remind this audience to stress that the achievements belong largely to the people of Ghana and in particular its farmers because they responded so positively to the urgings and leadership of the government I was privileged to lead. If they had resisted in the slightest bit, I'm sure we wouldn't have come this far. And my wish is that I could have done more for Ghana during my term in office.

This audience will also know that many of the programs I have outlined long ago transformed agriculture in South America and are already being followed elsewhere in Africa. Much of this work is being promoted on the continent of Africa through the comprehensive African Agricultural Development Program under the auspices of the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

But what has happened in Ghana on the lines how vital agriculture is to our hopes for a well-nourished, prosperous and stable world, and helps us identify what is needed to step up progress in Africa and other developing countries.

With the world's population passing seven billion this month, we cannot afford to wait any longer, ladies and gentlemen. So what are the lessons from Ghana's experience? What steps do we need to take?

First is the importance of political will and leadership at every level. You have to approach these challenges with a strong sense of purpose and ambition. The machinery of government has to be harnessed to deliver the changes we want to see. It needs government to put social justice at the heart of their plans but also to have awareness of the opportunities that the market brings.

Second, it is about building partnerships. Governments cannot achieve this change on their own. My government worked closely with communities and small, medium and large-scale farmers across Ghana. Donor countries and foreign direct investors played a role in Ghana's agricultural success.

Here I must also mention the Millennium Challenge Corporation of the United States for giving my government a grant \$547 million dollars, which we dedicated entirely to modernizing and commercializing agriculture. International NGOs such as the World Food Program and others also cooperated with us. The government built an entire network of public/private partnerships.

Further, we build partnerships with academic research institutions and universities around the world. The International Food Policy Research Institute remains such a partner. Science and technology hold the key to the progress the world must see to conquer hunger.

This includes a bigger role for nutritionists whose knowledge can help us shape diets to produce healthier families.

We need to do more to build global academic collaborations and to focus minds on Africa's distinctive agricultural challenges. There must be better use of information technology as well, to spread best practices.

Thirdly, we have to do more to involve the younger generation into agriculture. Policy must ensure this by making rural areas livable. The youth have the education needed to harness the new knowledge and techniques and also the use of machinery to increase yields. We need the energy and openness to new ideas. By providing lookout schools, electrification, good roads, and healthcare, by increasing their worth for farming, society will be keeping more young people on the land - and society must give priority attention to this, because the youth must be there to succeed the aging farmers.

Which brings me to my last point: Just as social justice is crucial at the national level, it is even more important internationally. We have to do more to harness the forces of globalization to help us eradicate hunger. We can't turn back the tide of globalization even if we wanted to, but we can make sure that trade rules are fair and enforced and do not favor the already-rich over the poor. We can also ensure agricultural partnerships in the developing world are not simply land grabs but beneficial to all stakeholders.

If we get this right, we will all benefit. Africa is said to have 60 percent of all unused arable land in the whole world. With the right partnerships and with social justice at the heart of our plans, Africa can become the breadbasket of the world.

So, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, into retirement, and I'm already retired as president – I still have something to contribute. So I have set up a foundation for leadership, governance and development, dedicated in part to continue the fight against hunger and poverty in Ghana and Africa.

Its mode of operation is to try to influence policy among governments on the continent and elsewhere and also heighten awareness of our youth of the development challenges facing our nations.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, there is no more basic need than the food we eat. In this effort I want to count on the partnership of organizations such as the World Food Programme, of which I am already the global ambassador against hunger, the World Bank, the Partnership for Child Development, International Food Policy Research Institute, and the Partnership to Cut Hunger and Poverty in Africa among others.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, the honor of the World Food Prize beckons me further to service to help fight hunger, to reduce poverty, especially on the continent of Africa. And I thank you very much for spurring me on by bestowing this honor on me. Thank you.

Ambassador Kenneth Quinn

Mr. President, you have inspired us, you have given us a call, but I think most of all what became apparent to me sitting there is, what we hope is that the World Food Prize will give you that further encouragement to do what the world needs so much, which is to hear your mission, to hear your words, to be inspired by what you achieved so that you are emulated in all other countries. And we hope from the bottom of our hearts that having this Prize will allow you to do that and continue that work. We so admire you, what you've achieved. We're so proud to have you here.

At this time I want to ask John Ruan III, our chairman, to come up and present to you the laureate diploma and the envelope.

I'm sure you have quite a full wall as well, but we hope there would be a place for this as well. Let me take it and just put it back on the table. It was easier to get it back from you than President Lula this morning. And the envelope, please.

John said, the real prize is inside the envelope.

One more round of applause for President John Kufuor, the 2011 World Food Prize Laureate. And here the Iowa Ghanaian Society is here, specially turned out in large numbers to honor you today.