

October 15, 2004 – 12:00 noon

LAUREATE LUNCHEON

The Honorable Thomas Vilsack
Governor of Iowa

Thank you very much. To the professor and the doctor who I have just been acknowledged, let me add my personal thanks for your work, not just as a citizen of this great state that is so pleased to be the home of the World Food Prize, but as a citizen of the world. Your willingness to expand food supplies that are safe and secure means a great deal to all of us. It means the opportunity for emerging nations and citizens within those nations to get the nutritious food that will allow them to build strong, vital nations and peaceful nations. Your work extends beyond the lab. It extends beyond the field. It literally has an impact on all of us. And so, please accept the gratitude of myself and the people of our great state, for your work.

I would suggest to you that it's very fitting that we have the World Food Prize in the state of Iowa. Not only are we fortunate enough in this state to be the home of Dr. Normal Borlaug, and I will tell you that every time I am in Dr. Borlaug's presence, I have some degree of difficulty. It is not often that we have the opportunity to be in the presence of greatness, but every time Dr. Borlaug comes back to his own state, we are blessed not only by his work but by his enthusiasm for young people. I read this morning a wonderful quote from you, Dr. Borlaug, that it is the young people that inspire you, that allow you to continue your work. I can think of no greater statement about a life than someone of your distinction being inspired to the young people by those of you who are here. It is truly an honor to be with you again, and we are certainly pleased to have this opportunity.

But, you know, it's beyond just the fact that Dr. Borlaug is an Iowan. This is a state, as Secretary Judge well knows, that prides itself on being a fairly productive agricultural state. We have 92,500 farms, approximately 32 million acres of farmland that is planted. Last year, and I suspect we'll probably exceed these numbers this year, those acres produced 1.9 billion bushels of corn. They produced 494 million bushels of soybeans. They helped to raise 1.8 billion pounds of beef, 6.6 billion pounds of pork, 252 million pounds of turkeys, 29 million pounds of lamb, and 9.9 billion eggs, and 3.8 billion pounds of milk.

There is significance to their numbers, and first and foremost it's the economic significance of those numbers. It represents approximately \$14 billion of economic activity that takes place in one state of this great country. But I would suggest to you that it also creates an enormous responsibility to share the wealth, to enable the state of Iowa to fulfill its responsibility

and live up to the tradition represented by Dr. Borlaug, represented by Henry Wallace, represented by Henry Hoover and other humanitarians.

You see, we have a responsibility beyond simply producing a lot of food and fiber. We have a responsibility to help lead the world to a safer place. And one way we will do that is by expanding agricultural opportunity, not just in our state but in all places in the world. The reality of science is that we are fast approaching a day and an age where literally there is no place in the world where we can't have productive agriculture. The science that's taking place at our great universities is expanding dramatically the knowledge that we have about the genetic makeup of plants and animals and what can be done.

For the young people who are here from my state, you may not realize that all of those acres of corn and beans do more than simply produce food, more than produce feed for livestock. In the state today, corn and/or beans are being used to make fabric for clothes. They are being used to produce chemicals that are used by our industries to speed up the industrial process. They have been used by furniture companies in our state to produce chairs and desks, a substitute for wood and plastic. You all know that they are used to produce fuel, and by the end of this year our state will be the number one renewable fuel producer in the country – more ethanol and soy diesel produced here than anyplace in the United States of America.

They're also being used to produce nutraceuticals, and with time and patience and more science, they will in fact be able to produce cures for illnesses and diseases. There is research taking place in Northwest Iowa today in which the protein from mother's milk can be raised in unlimited quantities in corn, reduced to a powdery substance, added to water and given to a child who is suffering from dehydration as a result of diarrhea – and that will save that child's life.

It is the second leading cause of death among children worldwide, and we are going to solve that problem. The reason we celebrate science, the reason why we give a World Food Prize is to encourage an expansion of that science because it has the key to a safer and more secure world. Frankly, we read and see a lot about terror in the world today, and we are all concerned about it. My country's response has been predominantly a military response, understandable in light of what happened on September the 11th. But if we're serious about winning the war on terror, if we're serious about making sure the world's a safer and better place, then we must also address the root causes of terror. We must address hunger, we must address poverty, we must address illness and disease. And science and agriculture have the key to how we solve these problems.

I remember very vividly traveling to South Africa and Nigeria – the first Iowa governor to have the privilege to do so – and visiting with a farmer from a nearby village, not too far from Lagos, Nigeria. The farmer had been encouraged to plant a different kind of crop, one that was genetically different. He was encouraged because he was told that it would increase yields. Now, everybody in his village was skeptical. Everyone didn't believe that the science had the power to make very unproductive land more productive. But this man took a risk. He took a chance. He planted that crop. And wouldn't you know, the year that he planted it, there was a very serious drought in his area, and all of his surrounding friends and neighbors in the village had very little to show for their effort. But his crop was bountiful.

You see, there's a lot of work to be done in this state to make sure that farmers all over the world become more comfortable with what we currently know, how we can be more productive. And if we take our science and our agriculture and we're capable of producing a more nutritious food that meets the needs not just of filling the belly but also ensuring healthy bodies, then young people all over the world can grow strong. And strong, healthy young people can become well-educated young people. And well-educated young people can become successful young people. And successful young people are not likely to turn to terror as a way of dealing with the difficulties of the world. They will build and not destroy.

If we can take what we grow and what we know and combine them, we can produce renewable fuels that aren't harmful to the environment. And we can produce nutraceuticals and ultimately pharmaceuticals that will cure illnesses and diseases that are currently ravaging not just a village, not just a country, but continents.

You see, I think that's the calling of America. I think that's the calling for Iowa. A great nation accepts the great challenges, and we in this state with extraordinarily productive land, unbelievably technologically advanced farmers and great universities, doing fundamental research, can be that place that provides the answers to problems that have plagued this world for literally centuries.

To the young people who are here, every generation of Americans has been challenged. Some were challenged with starting this great country. Some were challenged with bringing this country together when it was divided over fundamental issues involving slavery. Some were challenged when depressions and economic recessions hit. Some were challenged by world events. You are challenged to come up with the solutions that address poverty, illness and disease. You are challenged with the opportunity and the responsibility, coming from a state that is so bountiful, to figure a way in which we can use our bounty and our science to ensure that not just the people in this room, not just the people in this state, not just the people in this country are privileged to eat well, but that we all eat well.

This is a big challenge. But the World Food Prize and the institutes sponsored by the World Food Prize give you the gateway, give you an understanding of how you might be able to get to that solution. And the example of the laureates, the example of Dr. Borlaug, the example of Henry Wallace, the example of Henry Hoover give you the tradition that calls you to accept this challenge.

We are great state, and I could tell you a lot about this state that you don't know, a lot about the quality of life and the quality of education and the healthcare systems. But the greatest thing about this state is that tradition. The greatest thing about this state is the ability to accept that challenge. The greatest thing about this state is that we have been extraordinarily blessed, and with that blessing comes great responsibility.

The entire world is here in Des Moines, Iowa. The entire world gets to see what we see every day. And I will tell you – when I visit with folks as I did yesterday from China, as I will in a few minutes from Korea, as I talked yesterday with the ambassador from Algeria, they are struck by the beauty and bounty of Iowa – something that maybe we sometimes take for granted.

So I appreciate the opportunity today, particularly since there are young people here, to talk about the future of this great state and put it in the context of the World Food Prize and its mission to expand the security and safety of food supplies – to encourage you, to urge you, to plead with you to continue the pursuit of science, to embrace it and use it and understand its power and understand that it's not enough to be concerned about your community or your state or your nation, that in this global economy, in this world of instant communication, we have an even greater responsibility to those who suffer and those in need.

Those who have come before us have responded to that call. And history will judge us on how well we respond to this challenge.

Thank you very much.

Governor Vilsack

I don't want to leave with the impression that we have done just what Minnesota has done. With respect to Dr. Borlaug, who I know has Minnesota connections and with respect to our friends from the north, one of the great opportunities in the future for the World Food Prize is to have not just a wonderful symposium, not just a few days during the month of October to celebrate who we are and what we do here, but there needed to be a permanent location for the World Food Prize. And with the assistance of the Iowa legislature and a program which I'm very proud of, called, "Vision Iowa," we were able to work in partnership with the local community here and with the Ambassador and the Ruans to create a permanent home for the World Food Prize. And I am looking forward to the day that when we have visitors from afar, we can take them to a facility that is equal in quality and class to the events that have taken place the last several days. And with the Ambassador's leadership and the Ruans' generosity and leadership, I'm sure that day is not too far from happening.

So again, with respect to Minnesota, the proclamations are great, but we've got the home.