

Condolences to the family and friends of Norman Borlaug

From: Dr. Monty Jones, Executive Director, Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA)

All of us who are left on this crowded planet, and generations yet to come, will have reason to be grateful to Norman Borlaug. By his own work, and by the inspiration he gave to so many others, he improved the lives of everyone. Agriculturalists will forever be aware that we could and should achieve so much more and that our determination to do what needs to be done must not be overcome by fear of controversy.

Norman Borlaug in his Nobel acceptance speech taught us that honours should be accepted with humility and in the understanding that they carry with them even greater responsibility to lead by example. Those of us who were privileged to meet him in his later years can testify that he never wavered from meeting that responsibility and to the effectiveness of his unfaltering advocacy for the causes he believed in.

At an age when most men have retired Norman Borlaug entered spiritedly into the debate about whether high-yield agriculture would be good for Africa. He tried to balance the need to conserve the environment with the need to save lives and provide hope to the hundreds of millions of desperately poor small farmers in Africa. His answer was to produce more food from less land so as to leave land for other vital environmental services such as conserving water and protecting biodiversity. He argued that low-input agriculture would not meet either objective. He understood that chemical-fertilizer use in Africa is so small that an increase in harmony with the application of best conservation practices, including integrated pest management which reduces the use of harmful pesticides, could increase a long way before causing the problems about which the environmentalists are rightly concerned.

He aimed to create the circumstances in which Africa could increase farm production, not just by the 3.3 percent required annually over 30 years just to keep pace with growing population, but by the 6 percent target set by Africa's leaders as the requirement to sustainably meet the Millennium Development Goals of reducing hunger and poverty. We share his view that the best person to expect to conserve the environment is not one who is fighting for survival but rather one who has broken out of the poverty trap and has the hope, energy and funds needed to invest in better practices and incidentally also to have smaller families. We accept Africa's friend Norm's challenge to make that happen.

On behalf of all African and non-African stakeholders in African agricultural research and development and on my personal behalf I ask his family and friends and the people of the United States of America to accept our condolences and thanks for a life well lived. We will be forever grateful.

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