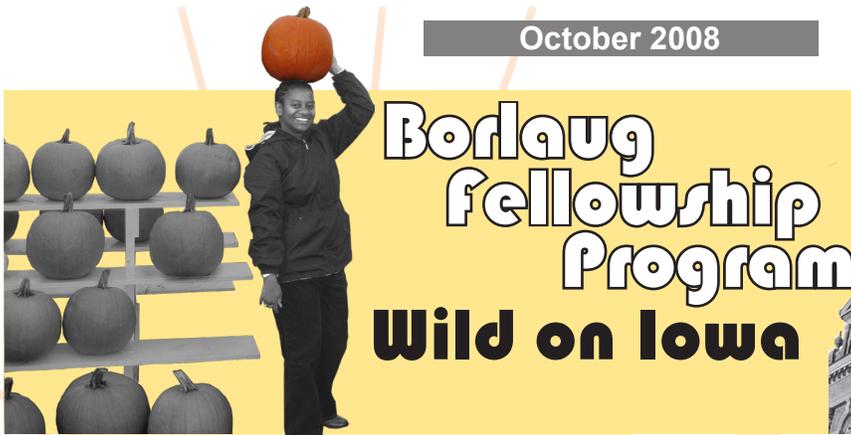


October 2008



# Borlaug Fellowship Program

## Wild on Iowa



From October 14-17, 2008, a group of 36 Borlaug Fellows from 18 different countries were in Iowa to tour the family farms and agricultural industries in and around Des Moines, Iowa. They also attended the various World Food Prize symposiums and were special guests at the World Food Prize Awards Ceremony.

The agricultural tour given to the Borlaug Fellows exposed them to two different, but interdependent sides of agriculture in Iowa: the large agribusinesses that produce the inputs (seeds, chemical sprays, fertilizers) and the farmers who then use

**The New Day is as Fresh as Clean Linen**  
By Jimmy Nguyen

those inputs to produce their goods. The first stop was to Monsanto, a leading producer of the herbicide “Round-up” and various genetically-engineered seed types, Monsanto simultaneously plays the role of protagonist and villain to millions of farmers and consumers all around the world, who rely on Monsanto’s products for increased yields but who can eventually become too overly dependent on those products putting them into long-term debt. The visit to a Monsanto laboratory in Ankeny allowed the Fellows to witness the complicated processes and machinery that Monsanto uses to produce a viable seed. Most of the Fellows were interested in the research going into high-yield seeds and it was reflected in their questions. When the question of how difficult it was to engineer a high-yield seed came up, Monsanto molecular biologist Seth Dobrin said that locating all the genes in a plant that affected yield was as difficult as finding all the genes associated with intelligence in humans. Now if only we could find a gene for intelligence in vegetables and

activate those genes so that we could talk to the vegetables and ask them if they could be any more nutritious and delicious for our enjoyment.

The second stop on the tour was to Griffieon family farm near Ankeny. Upon arriving to the farm, the Fellows immediately made themselves comfortable on the 1,150 acre farm. They were able to roam the vast farm inspecting livestock, checking out seeders and combines, and tasting fresh apples. LaVon Griffieon, an outspoken advocate for organic agriculture and her husband, Craig, who farms the majority of their farm conventionally (monoculture production employing the use of various herbicides) played out the historic feud and reluctant coexistence between the different schools of farming on a familial level: organic vs. conventional, small-scale vs. large-scale, polyculture vs. monoculture. Although the farm’s livelihood depends on the dynamic duo of conventionally-grown soy and corn, LaVon and her daughter, Autumn Aogden, have been able to incorporate some sustainable, locally-minded practices onto the farm like building mobile chicken coops to replenish the soil with manure and prevent over-grazing of fields, raising organic vegetables in intensive beds, and direct marketing chicken, beef, and pork to local consumers.

The tour of Griffieon Farm was informative;



Indian Borlaug Fellows Dr. P.V.K. Sasidhar, Dr. A.K. Naik, and Dr. Dipika Murugkar (left to right) enjoy fresh apples that they picked right from the limb on Griffieon Farm.



Dr. Nebojsa Nedic, an apiculture specialist and Borlaug Fellow from Serbia heeds a warning sign at the Chichaqua Greenbelt Bottoms prairie and wetland restoration project area.

Fresh as Clean Linen, cont'd

however, there was a disconnection between the Fellows and this “small” American family farm. A similar sentiment was shared by many of the Fellows: “You would never see a farm of such immense size in my country.” Although a 1,150 acre farm in the Midwest may be considered small, most of the farmers in developing countries have less than 5 acres of land. The huge seeders, combines, and tractors that dotted Griffieon Farm were an abstraction to the Fellows, a nice photo-op maybe. The bright eyes and smiles that came to the Fellows’ faces after the costs of each piece of equipment were thrown out – “\$250,000, \$300,000, \$500,000” – were a polite way of expressing the sense of how vastly different agriculture was in the U.S. compared to their countries. Even with all the expensive equipment, high-tech seeds and sprays, and thousands of acres of fertile black clay loam soil, many farmers in Iowa were struggling to keep their farms afloat. It was evident that the former Secretary of Agriculture Earl “Rusty” Butz’s “Get Big or Get Out” style of American farming could not and should not be implemented in the same



Borlaug Fellows John Recha from Kenya (left) and Mamadou Chetima pose in front of a combine at Griffieon Farm.

way in developing countries. Different environmental conditions, cultural traditions of farming, and economic factors unique to each country need to be studied before implementing any major agricultural program or law.

As a result of poor government planning and deep-rooted economic and environmental factors, many small farmers all over the world are losing their land. Naturally, a message that did resonate with the Fellows was LaVon’s that warned against the loss of farmland in her area. LaVon was active in her community at raising awareness about urban sprawl and its threat to fertile farmland in the area. The loss of farms in the U.S. and the rest of the world shared the same root causes: rural brain drain, unstable commodity prices, rising costs of farm inputs, overdependence on government subsidies, and decreasing productivity resulting from erosion, soil degradation, and climate extremes. Luckily, the Fellows were able to continue their conversations with the Griffieon’s after we left the farm because they joined us for lunch.

Lunch was served at the Corn Crib, a catering and restaurant business, in Madrid. It is a family owned business that is on a no longer working farmstead overlooking corn and bean fields. After lunch was served at the Corn Crib, the Fellows were able to meet



LaVon Griffieon and daughter Autumn Aogden explain to Borlaug Fellows Na-Oume Ibrahim from Niger (far left) and Dr. Olanike Deji from Nigeria (left) about growing organic vegetables intensively in boxes with equal parts top soil, compost, vermiculite, and peat moss.

Karey Claghorn, Iowa Deputy Secretary of Agriculture. Claghorn, who had joined the Fellows during lunch, gave a presentation on Women in Agriculture that started an inspired discussion among the Fellows. Everyone in the room was in agreement that agriculture was a male-dominated world. Claghorn's presentation cited figures that proved as much with women farmers in the U.S. representing 27% of all U.S. farmers and in Iowa that percentage decreases to 22%. Still, the women farmers and agriculturalists in the room were undaunted at the prospects of changing the mistaken belief that women could not succeed in the sweet science of agriculture. In the U.S. many of the changes could come from hard work like creating community groups that fostered future leaders of women farmers like April Hemmes, the Country Soil Commissioner and owner of 1,000 acres in Hampton, Iowa. One of Hemmes' featured quotes states, "Any woman can farm if they want. The corn doesn't know who plants it, the cows don't care who feed them – its people that put limitations on people." However, for many women in developing countries it is more than simply changing mindsets but also changing laws. Several of the Fellows from Africa spoke about how official laws or local rules prevented women from owning land or even inheriting land. The discussion soon turned towards ways in which women, who did not or could not own their own land, could find ways to earn income from land that was owned by their family. Women could take an active role in marketing farm goods, starting side businesses like restaurants, or forming farming cooperatives. A great example to the Fellows was the Corn Crib itself. The business was started to take advantage of land

that was no longer being used for production.

Another example of a successful side farm business was found at Geisler Farm in Bondurant, the third stop on the agricultural tour. In 2005, Darrell and Malinda Geisler launched Growing Family Fun, an agritourism business that included a corn maze, farm store, education center, and pumpkin patch. The agritourism business, besides educating "city folk" about farming, earned extra income for the Geisler's and was a form of farm insurance in case corn and soybean prices dropped or there was an unforeseen drought or flood that could threaten the livelihood of the farm. As with investments, diet, and karaoke song selection, diversifying is the key to success on farms as well.

The tour concluded with a walk in the Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt, which stretches more than 8 miles along the South Skunk River in northeast Polk County. The area is Iowa's largest wetlands and prairie restoration project. Walking through the head-high Big Blue Stem and Indian Grass that covered the prairie I was able to talk to and learn more about the Fellows. I struck up a conversation with one particular Fellow, Lenis Liverpool from Nigeria, which lasted half of the prairie walk. Under the deadpan grayish-blue sky, Lenis told me about her studies on the convergence theory of development and her research on the effectiveness of technology in developing communities. She explained to me how the convergence theory predicted that developing countries would naturally develop



Iowa Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Karey Claghorn leads an open discussion about women in agriculture with Borlaug Fellows. The discussion followed a presentation about the women leaders in Iowa agriculture, which managed to inspire many of the women agriculturalists in the room to reenergize their efforts to promote women in their own countries.

mature economies and systems of governance one day reaching the level of the already developed countries. She told me to imagine a fallow field which symbolized the still to be captured potential of developing countries. As in nature, economic opportunities would gradually come to developing countries as seeds come to germinate in a fallow field. However, seeds would not produce to its highest potential unless the field was prepared correctly. This is where Lenis' studies on technological adoption in Ethiopia would give her a better picture of how to best prepare those fields. Well-intentioned aid in the form of modern farming equipment, infrastructure, and digital devices given to developing communities was sometimes ineffective at helping communities reduce poverty and disease. Thus, Lenis' studies tried to measure what conditions have to be already in place in communities for them to be ready to maximize new technology. This could be done by measuring the social capital available in the community. Where there already well-organized women's groups, farmer's cooperatives, church groups, etc. already present in the community? Where the basic necessities of life already available to the community i.e. running water, waste management, electricity? When these conditions, which are unique to each community, were met then the people would be able to maximize newer technology and gradually develop into healthy communities and persons, not only health in the form of physical health, but excellent mental and emotional health that would lead to in Dr. Dorian



Lenis Liverpool from Nigeria (left) and Seini Sabo from Niger inspect colorful gourds at the Geisler Farm's "Growing Family Fun" agritourism center.

Paskowitz's words, "A Supreme State of Well-Being."

From the conversations I had with Lenis, LaVon, and the other Fellows, I got the sense that the best and the brightest minds in agriculture were right with me on this agricultural tour. They literally thought about agriculture all day. When I would ask them what they did in their free time back home, their answers would like a creek to its gulf, gradually meander back to their work in agriculture. Of all the things that I loved about the Fellows, it was their humor and their the-new-day-is-as-fresh-as-clean-linen approach to life. I wish them the best of luck in their studies and work and thank them for teaching me so much about agriculture and the world.



Mamadou Chetima introduces himself to two Iowa officers at the World Food Prize Ceremony. Mamadou's curiosity, wisdom, and openness epitomizes the Borlaug Fellows' wonderful spirit and "The-New-Day-is-as-Fresh-as-Clean-Linen" approach to life.

# More Memorable Moments from the World Food Prize Week

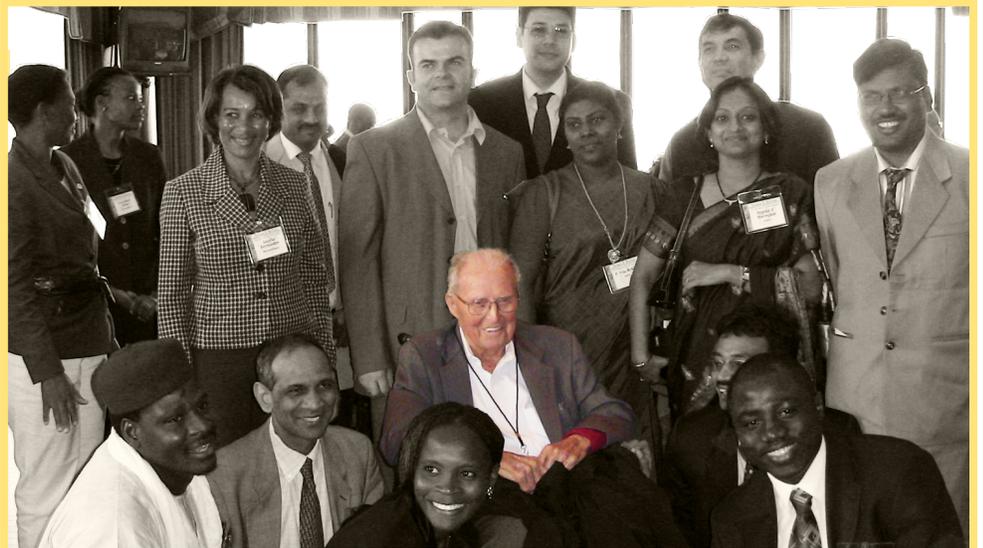
## George McGovern Speaks at the USDA-Hosted Side Event



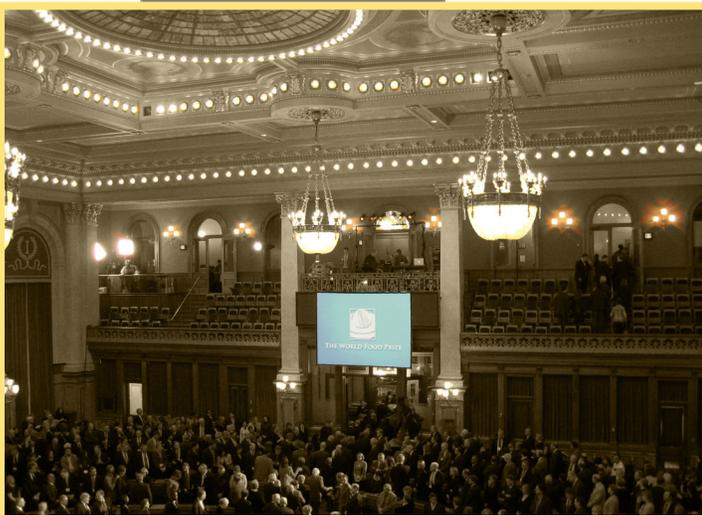
October 15 - FAS Deputy Administrator Patricia Sheikh (left) and USDA Under Secretary Mark Keenum listen as Senator George McGovern talks about the future of global food assistance programs, as well as his ideas, goals, and hopes for ending world poverty.

## Borlaug Fellows meet Dr. Norman E. Borlaug

October 15 - After the USDA-Hosted Side Event, the Borlaug Fellows enjoy lunch with Dr. Norman E. Borlaug, the inspiration for the USDA program. Dr. Borlaug did not feel well throughout the week, but was able to make time to meet and talk with the future agricultural leaders of the world - his very own Borlaug Fellows.



## World Food Prize Held at Spectacular Iowa State Capitol



October 16 - The 2008 World Food Prize or as some would say the “Nobel Prize for Food and Agriculture” honored Senators Robert Dole and George McGovern for their global commitment to promoting school feeding and child nutrition programs. The McGovern-Dole international school-feeding program was started in 2000 and since then has provided meals to over 22 million children in 41 countries. It has increased school attendance by an estimated 14% overall and 17% for girls.

# More Memorable Moments, cont'd

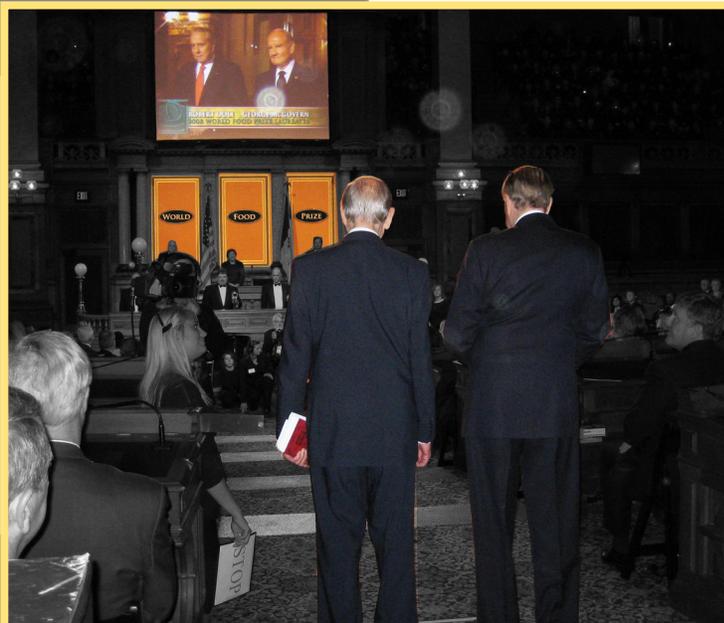


## Three Beautiful Dresses

Borlaug Fellows Mary Opoku-Asiama from Ghana (left), Dr. Olanike Deji from Nigeria, and Dr. Dipika Murugkar from India are adorned with bright and captivating dresses from their home countries. The women and the rest of their Borlaug colleagues were special guests seated in the upper balcony during the World Food Prize ceremony.

## Two Humanitarians

Senators George McGovern and Bob Dole walk down the auditorium steps to take their seats with previous winners of the World Food Prize. The highlight of the ceremony came when Senator McGovern sang "Jesus Loves the Little Children" during his speech. Many of the more than 700 people in attendance sang along with him. The speech, which was humorous and moving, also elicited tears from many in the audience, bringing an appropriate end to the World Food Prize week.



## Celebration

Fresh off of winning the World Food Prize, Senator Bob Dole gets an opportunity to meet Borlaug Fellows Na-Oume Ibrahim from Niger (left), Phyllis Mends from Ghana (right), and Dr. P. Nila Rekha (middle) from India before dinner is served. In a couple of years it may be one of the 36 Borlaug Fellows who attended the 2008 World Food Prize, who ends up winning the award.