

THE GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY CHALLENGE

Speaker: Chris Policinski

October 15, 2015 - 11:30 a.m.

Introduction:

Ambassador Kenneth M. Quinn

President - World Food Prize Foundation

Wonderful. You, Jim, you, Paul Schickler, everybody at DuPont and Pioneer, carrying forward not only Henry Wallace's Legacy, George Washington Carver's legacy, Norman Borlaug, but one of the things that I've noticed in now 15 years of doing this, is the incredible leadership and vision of the individuals who serve as chairmen, CEOs and senior officers of the all of the agribusiness and food companies. I don't think it's noticed as much as it should. We've seen here this morning David McLennan, now with Jim Borel, and now we're going to have a third individual who also contributes to that.

The Land O'Lakes, I tried my best to convince Chris Policinski that somehow Land O'Lakes must have been started in Iowa so we could claim this, but try as I might, it started in Minnesota. What he has done and what Land O'Lakes does as a cooperative is a model for emulation around the world. I have a great fondness for Chris because he was the very first CEO, right after he became CEO of Land O'Lakes in 2005, that I invited and he came and spoke at the World Food Prize and has been a great partner with us ever since and has helped guide me to understand so many parts of the food business through his service as a member of the board of directors, and Grocery Manufacturers Association, National Milk Producers, National Council of Farmer Cooperatives, and also in the organizations he supports in Minneapolis.

They've got a terrific program that they are doing to inspire young people, so it is my pleasure and honor to welcome my friend, Chris Policinski to the stage.

Chris Policinski

President and Chief Executive Officer, Land O'Lakes, Inc.

Thank you, thank you very much. Well, Ken, thank you very much for that nice introduction, and it is really good to be back here at the World Food Prize. I also have to thank you for suggesting the topic that I'm going to talk about today and for bringing the cheering section with me.

The topic is essentially – Are we as an industry attracting the kind of top talent we need to meet our fundamental purpose? And our fundamental purpose is a pretty noble purpose. It is producing enough food in an increasingly productive and sustainable way to feed hungry

people. Now, I have to tell you I'm an optimist. I think that can be done. But as you just heard from Jim, it's going to take innovation, it's going to take our best and brightest.

So over the next 30 minutes, what I want to do is three things: Very quickly tell you a little bit about Land O'Lakes and why we're so opinionated. Secondly, I want to even more quickly talk about the challenge, broadly – and you know what the challenge is – and then specifically around talent. Because I think it's a crisis that we're talking enough about. And last, I want to give you a call to action by describing how we as one company in our own way are trying to address this crisis. And the crisis is around talent and attracting top talent to our industry to drive the necessary innovation to fulfill our noble purpose – feeding hungry people in an increasingly sustainable manner.

Full disclosure – my comments are going to be shaped by the fact that just two days ago I got back from Africa, where we visited some of our global development projects in Rwanda and Kenya. And I was struck by two things.

First, the stakes are high – we have to get this right. Food is a basic human right. There's a lot of folks who go to bed hungry every night right now. Think about the soon-to-be 10 million people on this planet if we don't increase our production in a more sustainable manner. Beyond that, if that's not enough, I clearly was reminded of the link between food security, economic stability and political stability. And we've worked hard collectively to have that gate swing in a positive manner over the last decades. But that gate can swing the other way. So the first thing I was struck by is – stakes are high; we have to get this right.

Secondly, I was struck by – so much of our food dialogue, particularly in the United States, is shaped by our rich country's view of the world. It gives us tremendous latitude to market our food, to segment and differentiate. And I'm a free markets guy – that's terrific. But we have to be careful that we don't let that rich country point of view influence the things that developing countries need to drive their food security. We have to be very, very careful. You heard a little bit about that this morning. We can't have a war on science if we are going to be successful at feeding a hungry planet. And the stakes are high.

So let me jump in real quickly. Who is Land O'Lakes, and why are we so opinionated? Because, frankly, most of you, when you hear Land O'Lakes, think about what? The butter company. And that's accurate. We were formed in 1921 by Upper Midwest dairy farmers who produced a high-quality product, butter from sweet cream. Every city had a creamery, and they produced high-quality butter. The problem was, we were very fragmented, not unlike what we see in the developing world. They had no bargaining power in the channel, and they couldn't get their product to market profitably. So those farmers said – just like we see in the developing world – what if we formed a marketing company to aggregate our supply, gain power in the channel, and get our product to market profitably: simple but powerful idea. It worked. It worked brilliantly, was a huge success.

And those same farmers two or three years later said, "What if we had this company aggregate our supply, gain power in the channel, and buy things for us cheaper than we can buy? First, feed, later seed, and crop inputs – simple, powerful idea. Turn the clock forward nearly a hundred years. Those are our three main businesses today – Land O'Lakes food, the butter

company, Purina Feed in North America, and Winfield Solutions Crop Inputs, a big data precision agriculture company.

We are a \$15 billion-dollar fortune 500 company. All that's interesting, but the punchline is this chart. We are one of the few companies that truly sees the food industry end to end, all the way from the farm to the marketplace. That's rare. Most companies are clustered at one end or the other, highly branded, CPG, consumer packaged goods kind of food companies, or more commodity companies. So we're unusual. What makes us more distinctive is that we're still farmer owned. Every day we get up and listen to our owners regarding what they need to drive productivity and sustainability and output on their farms.

What makes us even more rare, maybe unique, is the fact that all of this is informed by our global development experience over the last four decades. Eighty countries, over 300 projects creating a food infrastructure in food-insecure parts of the world.

Now I want to be careful. This does not make us smarter than any of the great companies in this industry, even if they are focused at one end or the other, or they're not farmer owned. There are great companies in this industry, as Ken said. But it does allow us maybe to see the connections along the value chain differently. It does allow us maybe to see some trends earlier. And one trend we clearly see is we talk in silos, and that's a barrier to us attracting, telling our story, and attracting the kind of talent we need.

So what's the challenge again? Even more briefly, we have to figure out how to feed 10 billion people, nearly a 70% increase in food production between now and when my children are my age, with very limited resources – 12% more arable land; only half of that can be brought into production. We're already in the midst of a water crisis. That's a daunting challenge. And as I said, I'm optimistic we can meet this challenge. You saw some of these charts from the CEO at Cargill today, very similar charts. This chart just maps inputs and outputs since the '50s. The horizontal line, the value of all inputs – land, labor, capital, seed, feed, fertilizer – pretty flat line. The upward sloping horizontal line is the value of outputs – two and a half times more output, flat input. We've done this in the past. By the way, that's not just a productivity story, it's a sustainability story – more outputs, given level of inputs.

And in crops that we've really focused on, like corn, since the '30s, we are growing six and a half times more corn on 13% fewer acres. Can we double food production or increase food production between now and 2050 by 70%? Absolutely. The best predictor of future performance is past performance.

What's driven this historic performance? Fundamentally, two things. Farmers have adopted modern business practices on their farms. Farms got a little bit bigger. One neighbor who was more successful at farming bought out the next neighbor. And they were able to employ capital, not just hard work. They were able to employ their expertise better than the next person as they grew scale.

Secondly, farmers are brilliant at taking advantage of technology, everything from mechanization and harvesting to the tremendous biotechnology products that allow us to grow more food with less inputs, that allow us to adapt to climate variability, that allow us to

sequester carbon, that allow us to use more benign crop protection products as we grow more food – two fundamental drivers.

The irony of all this, though, is we've gone from a society where a quarter of America farmed in my grandparents' generation. If you had a question about where your food came from, you talked about it at the dinner table. You asked a trusted aunt or uncle or a trusted neighbor, and you got a fact-based answer from a source who (no pun intended) was grounded. Today, where does our 98% of America get their information about where their food comes from? The Internet, the source of all fact-based information.

And in fact, this has given rise to a situation where opinion, nostalgia, maybe a political or economic agenda, colors the discussion around our food supply. And it's led to a very divisive environment. You all know this. So much of our discussion in food today is shaped by good food or bad food, based on – did it come from a no-technology environment or a high-technology environment? Did it come from a small farm or a large farm? Did it come from a growing practice that's niche, like organic, or conventional? That debate is divisive, and unfortunately it's overwhelmed the great story we have to tell in agriculture.

This is an industry with a noble purpose – feeding hungry people. This is an industry with one of the grand challenges of our generation – figuring out how to nearly double food production between now and when my children are my age, with very limited resources. This is an industry that's entrepreneurial. This is an industry that's driven by technology, and increasingly that technology is enabling us to grow more food more sustainably. Wow! Yet we talk about one or the other. Our message isn't getting through to our top talent.

And by the way, my own opinion is, we just need to change one word in this debate – “for” to “and.” We need large farms to produce abundant food, high-quality food at low cost to feed lots of people. And we need small farms. Why? If nothing more, to keep rural communities vibrant for those few large farmers who need a welder, who need a school for their children. But more importantly, we need the incubators of the next great modern business practice or the next great technology. Where should that start? Where does that start in other industries? In the smaller farms. By the way, you heard in a couple of different ways – we need small farms in the developing world, because that's the coin of the realm. And we need to drive incremental improvement off of those small farms.

By the way, we need lots of technology, more than we have today, technology that fits large farms, medium farms, and small farms. And we've got plenty of room to niche the marketplace. I am a free markets guy – I think that's terrific. But let's be careful not to define a rich country's view of food and impose that on developing countries at their expense of food security.

Now, what's the solution? Back to the Land O'Lakes point of view and why I took so long to talk about we're one of those rare, if not unique, companies that sees the business and the end – farm to market, that's informed every day by a dialogue with farmers who are out in the field growing things and whose view is fundamentally shaped by looking at food security in food-insecure parts of the world.

What we see very clearly across the value chain is we talk about these things but in our own silos. So NGOs, many of which are in the room today, could do a much better job than I just did

talking about food insecurity. They can do a much better job describing the stakes of getting this right.

Industry, agriculture, farmers, can do a brilliant job of talking about output per unit of input, yield per acre. How many bushels of corn did I get this year? Consumers, the 98%, great news – they're interested in where their food comes from. They're interested in animal welfare, they're interested in on-the-farm labor practices. They want to know if they can trust where their food comes from. And by the way, they're seeking information and getting answers from the Internet, the source of all not-so-good information.

And academia has the best perch, I think, of anybody to knit this together but hasn't. And they haven't because it's kind of dangerous out there right now. Agriculture has a divisive discussion. The solution to telling our story, because we have a great one... this is an industry with a noble purpose. We feed hungry people. This is an industry with a grand challenge – doubling food production with very limited resources. This is an industry that's entrepreneurial, plenty of room for small farmers to innovate, to show us the next modern practice, to try on for size the next technology that Jim and his company and companies like him come up with to prove the concept out. We need large farms. We need all sorts of technology.

But we aren't telling our story because we're stuck in our silos, and it's sloppy to mix it up. But I'll tell you, when we mix it up, when industry, business and agriculture, farmers talk to NGOs, and when NGOs talk to consumers, and when academia knits the story together, I think we have the most exciting industry of our generation. But it's sloppy, because we have to talk with people who might not share our views. But if we do that and we're willing to engage, our discussion gets more robust. We gain more respect for one another, we gain creativity.

By the way, to the specific talent crisis, just to pay off my point, right now in industry, 2012, about 20% of the workforce overall is 55 years and over. By 2020 that will be 25% – pretty big number. In agriculture, look at the number – 75% of all farmers will be over 50 in 2012. Interesting. Got a crisis there, got a transition. Do we have enough of our top talent, our innovators coming to our farms?

By the way, in business, the USDA estimates there's almost 60,000 skilled jobs in agriculture that are needed each and every year. Guess what. We're only filling 60% of them. We're only graduating 60% of the numbers we need to fill those jobs. We have a talent crisis. We are not attracting the best and brightest to agriculture. Our workforce is aging. We have our skilled jobs going unfilled. My belief? Because we're not telling our story.

So the call to action – we have to get out of our silos, and each and every firm has to tell their story in their own way. So what did we do at Land O'Lakes? A simple but powerful idea – I hope it proves to be as powerful as what was started in 1921 by our farmer owners in the Upper Midwest. We created a program, basically a year-long internship. Last year we selected ten students, undergraduate students, from a variety of the top universities. We skewed our selection to 98%, 2%, more to folks who are not of a farming background. And we created an internship, year-long internship with the capstone being listening to their thoughts on how we're going to produce enough food to feed the soon-to-be ten billion people, with very limited resources. But we didn't just ask them. This internship has several components.

One component is we take them overseas – last year I think it was Zambia and Tanzania – for a ten-day experience to see what happens in food-insecure parts of the world. We take them to rural America for another week or ten days to see what happens on farms – large farms, medium farms, and small farms. We take them to Washington, DC, to see the regulatory environment that we operate in. Because one of the truths is – and I don't say this sometimes, but the reality is, we are successful in agriculture in the United States because we have an orderly regulatory environment. We take them to Washington for a week. And we take them through a couple of cycles in our headquarters building to see what we do in food, feed and crop inputs.

So Oswin was one of our ten students last year. She came from a management, marketing and international business background at Purdue. She had no on-farm experience. Without being specific about Oswin's project, I can tell you where she ended up, and her recommendations were not at all where she started. She started being very interested in food but being informed by the Internet – opinion, nostalgia, maybe a parochial economic agenda, maybe a political agenda influencing what she read. After a year-long internship, her proposal to feed a hungry planet was very different than the outline she wrote at the beginning of the program. It's a simple program. I hope it proves to be a powerful program.

And let me introduce you to the 2016 Land O'Lakes Global Food Challenge emerging leaders who are also my cheering crowd right here. Why don't you stand up and let everybody see you and recognize you?

Well, I want to thank all of you for your time, and Ken I want to thank you for the opportunity to come back to speak at the World Food Prize. We have a great story to tell, and we have to tell it – because the stakes are very high.

Thank you very much.