

Partners in Agriculture

Ambassador Kenneth M. Quinn
President, The World Food Prize Foundation

Global Food Security Symposium - April 7, 2010 - Tokyo, Japan

Remarks as prepared for delivery

The World Food Prize that I head was created by Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Dr. Norman E. Borlaug to inspire great breakthrough achievements in increasing the quality, quantity and availability of food. Both the President of Germany and the President of Mexico have called it “the Nobel Prize for Food and Agriculture.”

Over the past 25 years, the \$250,000 World Food Prize has been presented to Laureates from Asia, Africa, Latin America, Europe, the US and the United Nations. Dr. Gebisa Ejeta, whom you heard today, was our 2009 Laureate. Last October, representatives from more than 65 countries traveled to Des Moines, Iowa, to attend our Laureate Award Ceremony, and our Borlaug Dialogue symposium, which featured Bill Gates, Secretary Vilsack and five other Ministers of Agriculture.

While our conference today focused on international issues affecting global food security and gave emphasis to Japanese-US collaboration, there is a special connection for the U.S. state of Iowa to Japan:

- The World Food Prize Foundation which I head is located in Iowa;
- Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack is a former Governor of Iowa;
- There is a special delegation here led by Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey, which is commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Yamanashi Hog Lift, by which Iowa rushed some of its finest Iowa hogs and Iowa corn to Japan to help reconstitute extensive losses caused by two devastating typhoons;

- And on March 25, we just celebrated the anniversary of the birth of Dr. Norman E. Borlaug, who was born in Iowa, the Father of the Green Revolution, the founder of the World Food Prize, and one of America's and the world's greatest humanitarian heroes. He also had a special connection to Japan.

Dr. Borlaug, who passed away last September 12, was revered in countries around the world for his amazing breakthrough achievements in producing a new “miracle” wheat that uplifted farmers in Mexico and then saved India and Pakistan from famine and mass starvation in the 1960s. Dr. Borlaug is credited with saving a billion lives. In 1970, he received the Nobel Peace Prize for this accomplishment.

But what is less known is that it was the work of a Japanese scientist that allowed Dr. Borlaug to lead what became the single greatest period of food production and hunger reduction in all human history.

That Japanese scientist was Gonjiro Inazuka. His work in 1935 at the Iwate Prefectural Agriculture Experiment Center centered around his development of a dwarf strain of wheat, known as NORIN-10. This accomplishment so intrigued some other agricultural scientists that they requested some of his seeds and then shared them with other colleagues, some of whom were in North America. In turn, through an informal network of young, dedicated plant breeders and pathologists, some of these seeds found their way to Mexico and into the hands of Dr. Norman E. Borlaug in the 1950s.

Dr. Borlaug had come to Mexico in the 1940s, and was in the middle of a decade-long effort to find a way to develop new varieties of wheat that could resist deadly rust disease, while at the same time increasing yields. His efforts had only marginal success until Borlaug found that by joining together the new strains of wheat that he had developed, with Gonjiro Inazuka's NORIN-10 seeds, that a revolutionary new plant could be generated which would resist disease while dramatically increasing grain production. These seeds would lift the poorest farmers of Mexico out of poverty and would eventually be taken by Borlaug to India and Pakistan, where they produced similar results as these two countries faced imminent famine and mass starvation in the 1960s. Hundreds of millions of people in South Asia were saved from famine, starvation and death, thanks to this Japanese-American collaboration.

Borlaug's approach to agriculture, including the use of fertilizer and irrigation, eventually spread throughout the Middle East and was adapted to rice in Southeast Asia. It is said of Borlaug that over a lifetime, he probably saved a billion lives. He was credited in Atlantic Magazine as being "the man who had saved more lives than any other person who has ever lived."

But Norman Borlaug always recognized that it was his partnership with Dr. Inazuka – a man he had not met – that had produced this enormous humanitarian achievement. It was a historic achievement which would not have occurred without this essential Japanese-American collaboration.

Dr. Borlaug recalled that in 1981, he visited Japan and finally met Gonjiro Inazuka. He said Mr. Inazuka was a very modest person and very friendly. Just like Dr. Borlaug! Dr. Borlaug recalled that these two humble men "broke open a keg of sake, to celebrate the NORIN-10 dwarfing gene," the gene that saved hundreds of millions of lives. A few years later, after Mr. Inazuka passed away, Dr. Borlaug returned to Japan and planted a tree in honor of Gonjiro Inazuka in his home town. It will always be a lasting symbol of the incredible achievement of this Japanese-American effort.

In my own diplomatic career as a US State Department Foreign Service officer, I had the same opportunity to see the enormous transformative power that the Japanese-US partnership could exert. About a week ago, I received an unexpected phone call from a retired Japanese diplomat: Katsuhiko Shinahara, who was Japan's ambassador to Cambodia. He is retired and was traveling in the U.S. He called simply to renew our acquaintance because of what we had done together. In the 1990s, Ambassador Shinahara and I worked very closely together in coordinating our countries' efforts to transform Indochina following the Vietnam War and the genocidal Khmer Rouge devastation of Cambodia.

One of my responsibilities at that time was to chair the US Interagency Committee that searched for missing American military personnel who had not been accounted for or whose remains had not been recovered from the battlefield and returned home for burial. Accounting for our missing servicemen in Indochina was at the center of the process of normalizing relations between Vietnam and the United States. It was a long and difficult process which lasted many years. I told Ambassador Shinahara that

I still recalled testifying before the US Congress on this process. And at that time, I said openly and on the record that Japan was the single greatest friend that America had in this endeavor.

In my personal capacity today, I wish to repeat this statement, and to acknowledge further that the US-Japanese partnership was also critical in promoting the UN agreement on Cambodia which reopened that country to the world and led to the extinction of the genocidal Khmer Rouge.

At that time, Japan and the United States shared a philosophy of development – with great emphasis on the importance of infrastructure, especially roads and bridges. I recall coming to Tokyo in the 1990s to coordinate this approach with Ambassador Shinahara and other senior Japanese officials. Both of our countries focused on building highways and bridges throughout Cambodia. And everywhere a new road was opened, the Khmer Rouge influence was diminished. In 1999, as I completed my tour as US Ambassador to Cambodia, the last Khmer Rouge surrendered. Earlier this year, I returned to Cambodia and Vietnam. Today, Southeast Asia and Indochina are transformed. People are living in peace and their lives are improved greatly, thanks in significant part to US-Japanese leadership and collaboration.

So the message of this entire conference should be clear. As we face the daunting challenge of how to lift the more than one billion people on our planet out of their extreme food insecurity, we should again look to the leadership which Japan and the US can provide together. That is the message I hope you heard today. I believe it would be the message of Dr. Norman Borlaug if he could have been here today.

But there is one other Japanese-American collaboration that deserves to be recognized.

While Latin America, South Asia and East Asia all prospered thanks to Norman Borlaug's leadership and Gonjiro Inazuka's seeds, Africa somehow was bypassed. In the mid-1980s, when he was 70 years old, Dr. Borlaug told me that he was approached by a man from Japan who asked Dr. Borlaug to join with him in an endeavor to reduce hunger and increase food security on that distant continent to bring the Green Revolution to Africa. Unlike almost every other moment of his life, Dr. Borlaug told me he was feeling tired and perhaps at the end of his career. At age 70, he was thinking about retiring. And so he told the Japanese gentleman who approached him that he was so very sorry, but he could not join

with him in this effort. Obviously disappointed, the Japanese individual reluctantly accepted this decision.

However, as Dr. Borlaug told the story to me, the next day he got an agitated phone call from the same Japanese man. He was extremely upset. In a stern tone, the man told Dr. Borlaug that he had checked his biography and discovered that Norm Borlaug was fifteen years younger than he was. The Japanese man told Dr. Borlaug that if he, so much older, was strong enough to undertake this effort in Africa, Dr. Borlaug could not say he was too old and too tired. He concluded the conversation by saying to Dr. Borlaug, “There is so much to do. We start tomorrow.” Norm Borlaug told me he had no choice. He could not say no.

That man who called Dr. Borlaug was Ryoichi Sasakawa. That conversation began a partnership which over the past twenty-five years would join Norman Borlaug and former President Jimmy Carter to the Nippon Foundation in the Sasakawa Global 2000 program. It was the beginning of another shining example of Japanese-American global leadership, this time in a historic effort to reduce hunger and poverty in Africa.

The energy that was passed to Norm Borlaug during that initial meeting with Ryoichi Sasakawa was similar in many ways to the energy that was imparted to him by those NORIN-10 seeds. Those seeds had enabled him to develop a crop and an approach to agriculture that would spread around the world, affecting hundreds of millions of people. Similarly, the seed of an idea that Ryoichi Sasakawa planted with Norm, spread their effort all over Africa to bring research and science to the monumental task of uplifting hundreds of millions of hungry people.

When Ryoichi Sasakawa passed away, the mantle of this partnership passed to his son, Yohei Sasakawa, who is here with us today. Yohei Sasakawa became Norman Borlaug’s partner and for the next 15 years with their leadership, the Nippon Foundation and Sasakawa Global 2000 have continued the efforts to develop new crops (such as the Quality Protein Maize which was awarded the 2000 World Food Prize). Their projects have spread across Africa, uplifting millions of lives and providing an inspiration to others to follow. Today, as never before, there is a global focus on Africa, thanks in large part to this unique Japanese-American collaboration.

At Norman Borlaug's memorial service last October 6, four individuals with a very special relationship to Dr. Borlaug were invited to speak about him. One was Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack. Another was Yohei Sasakawa.

It was one of Dr. Borlaug's fondest wishes that the Sasakawa family and the Nippon Foundation could be recognized for the amazing work that it has produced during the time of its partnership with him. Not long before he died, he asked me to be sure to have this happen. So I know it is a special regret for him that he was not able to be here in person to see this recognition take place. And yet I feel certain that Norm's spirit is with us today, just as are those of Gonjiro Inazuka and Ryoichi Sasakawa. I believe they all would be smiling in recognizing all that happened as a result of their efforts and this very special Japanese-American collaboration, and all that can happen as a result of this conference.

With this in mind, it is my great privilege and personal honor to present to Mr. Yohei Sasakawa the Norman E. Borlaug Medallion which the World Food Prize awards only to those very senior individuals or institutions which have played a very significant role in fighting hunger. Given very rarely, the only previous presentation was to His Majesty the King of Thailand. For their truly remarkable humanitarian efforts and global leadership, the Sasakawa name and that of the Nippon Foundation will be recorded forever in the new Dr. Norman E. Borlaug Hall of Laureates in Des Moines, Iowa, which will be the permanent home of the World Food Prize.

Just like the tree that Norman Borlaug planted in Gonjiro Inazuka's home town, it will forever be a reminder that Japanese-American collaboration can truly change the world.