

15th September 2009

Commemoration Letter in honour of Prof. Borlaug

The news was sad: Prof. Borlaug left this world a few days ago, after a long and fruitful life. Active until the end, Borlaug achieved what too few in history have: he saved the lives of hundreds of millions by making it possible for them to feed themselves, brought hope to small-holding farmers and their families throughout the world, and tirelessly campaigned for policies and technologies offering food security now and in the future. His Nobel Peace Prize is almost a footnote in a lifetime of achievement.

However, the most telling memory of Norman Borlaug is not of the man receiving the Nobel medal or of the lecturer in the CIMMYT conference hall. Instead, it is him sitting in the CIMMYT coffee-room with young scientists and visitors from all parts of the world, drinking a cup of coffee at 8 o'clock in the morning. Rather than sitting in regal isolation, he was chatting and smiling to a group of very young scientists and visitors and listening to them with interest. He was curious about every little advance and each little experiment, as if these minutiae of scientific life were of ground-breaking importance. To talk to him for a few minutes made you very grateful and satisfied. You felt part of something, you felt a scientist sharing your experience with somebody else able to understand your frustrations, your excitement, and you even felt useful to the humanity! His was a very enlightened mind, always ready to study and to understand something new about wheat, his favourite object of study.

Borlaug's modesty and simplicity was also his greatness, the secret for his excellence. He was able to believe that through science *"we can improve the world and the quality of life"* yet to offer to millions of people the possibility to overcome and fight the famine and poverty, he also needed to be strong, tenacious, stubborn, persevering and, in the end, able to build a solid scientific organization working on wheat and to grow up a very large network of scientists over the world.

Even this spring, to the 7th International Triticale symposium in Ciudad Obregon, he had words rich of enthusiasm, despite his illness, pushing people to go on with determination, without suffering fatigue. It is said of one that saves a single life, it is as if he saved the entire world. What can be said, then of one who saved hundreds of millions of lives?

For all he gave us, and for all he gave the world, we wish to say:

Thank you Prof. Borlaug!

We cannot thank you enough!

Dr. Patrizia Galeffi (Italy)

Prof. Alan Schulman (Finland)

Dr. Catherine Feuillet (France)

and

COST FA0604 Tritigen Project (59 scientists of the management committee)

<http://tritigen.ari.gov.cy/>