

The Food Sovereignty Award - the Real "Food-For-People" Prize

By Margot Mcmillen, farmer, teacher, writer and activist, Missouri Rural Crisis Center

Every year since 1986, the Norman Borlaug fan club, made up of the big winners in the Green Revolution, has awarded a prize to some corporate tiller of the field. The "World Food Prize" is headquartered in Des Moines, Iowa in the former public library building. From this modest address, the chemical producers, giant combine builders, soybean processors and hog owners give the award mostly to researchers who have helped build the system of patented seeds and chemical inputs—a system that excludes small farmers and has convinced the rest of us that chemically-flavored soy paste and corn sweeteners are nutrition. A look at the sponsors tells all: DuPont Pioneer, John Deere Foundation, Monsanto, Bayer CropScience, Cargill, General Mills, Hormel, PepsiCo, Walmart, and literally all the Iowa commodity associations.

Borlaug was the guy credited with using chemical fertilizers to obtain ever-increasing yields of corn and soybeans. Before the work of him and his co-scientists, farmers had used manure to fertilize the land. They also used natural cures for invasions of pests and weeds. The Food Prize website intones: "As we conclude the yearlong centennial observance of the birth of our founder, Dr. Norman E. Borlaug, the 2014 Borlaug Dialogue international symposium will draw



Protests at the World Food Prize

upon Dr. Borlaug's legacy and address 'The Greatest Challenge in Human History: Can We Sustainably Feed the 9 Billion People on our Planet by the Year 2050?'

Understand, dear reader, that when the World Food Prize uses the word "we" they mean "the multinational corporates." It goes on, "The Dialogue will give special emphasis to the powers of intensification, innovation and inspiration to uplift smallholder farmers and meet the increasing demand for nutritious food. . . " "Uplift?" The WFP writers mean, "get big or get out. . . " Let's be clear, friends. What they're really asking is "can we feed the people who can pay for food that we've created in our laboratories, patented and raised with the water, air and land that we've stolen from small landholders, indigenous tribes and other powerless folk?"

Finally, in 2009, a few brave

thinkers created an alternative prize. We might call it the REAL food-for-people prize. This newer prize, the Food Sovereignty Prize is awarded by the US Food Sovereignty Alliance which, in their words, "works to end poverty, rebuild local food economies, and assert democratic control over the food system." Sponsors include Ecowatch, the Small Planet Fund, Why Hunger?,

Grassroots International and the Presbyterian Hunger

Program. Unlike the Borlaug-driven prize, which rewards corporations for systems that invade ecosystems and beat nature into submission, providing corn and soybeans for the world, the FSA rewards people who farm in their own ecosystems in an ecologically sound manner. They reward schools for serving healthy, culturally-based foods. This is how all peoples ate before the Green Revolution.

Nobody would argue against the fact that food (and air and water) are human necessities and public goods. All of us know that hunger drives unrest, resource grabs, rioting and disease. But the World Food Prize corporates want to own the solution while the Food Sovereignty Prize believes that every ecosystem and culture will invent their own solutions, with local solutions connected to an international movement for food sovereignty.

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By 1930, in the first throws of the Great Depression, an estimated 1 million Blacks had left the South, in what is known as the Great Migration. Unfortunately, New Deal policies that followed the Depression provided only measured assistance to Black farmers. Subsidies distributed through the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) generally accumulated to large White landowners, who rarely distributed money among their sharecroppers and tenants — most of whom were Black. Similarly, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) made grants to White farmer applicants far more often than Black farmers. In June 1934, for example, there were 84 applications from Blacks and 49 from Whites. The FERA accepted 24 applications, all from White farmers.

USDA Discrimination

One bright spot was the newly formed Farm Security Administration at the USDA, created to make loans to tenant farmers. This first widespread government assistance to Black farmers since the Freedmen's Bureau allowed thousands of Blacks to purchase small farms.

But for every acre gained by Black farmers under Farm Security Administration, thousands more were lost to a new threat — heir and property laws — as Blacks continued to vacate the South in the 1940s and 50s. As farmers died or left the region, hard-earned property was often distributed among family members who no longer lived

on the land or valued their connection to farming. Tax and property laws were new weapons used to return Black land to White control. If one heir could be convinced to sell his portion, sale of the entire property could be forced, since it had not been legally apportioned to the other heirs (a practice that has continued to the present).

Since then, systematic discrimination at the federal level through the USDA hastened the decline of Black-owned land, especially through the Farm Service Agency (FSA). In 1998, Black farmers filed a class action lawsuit against the USDA after years of being denied farm loans. The case was initially settled in April 1999, with farmers who could prove discriminatory treatment in loan decisions from the USDA between 1981 and 1999 receiving payments. This is the largest civil rights settlement to date.

While some 13,300 Black farmers received compensation under the Pigford v. Glickman settlement, another 70,000 Black farmers filed late and have not had their claims heard. The 2008 Farm Bill provided for additional claims to be heard and in December 2010, Congress appropriated \$1.2 billion through Pigford II to compensate Black farmers. The damage, of course, was done. A loan delayed is a loan denied, and for far too many Black farmers. USDA's discrimination was the final nail in the coffin that kept them from successfully maintaining their farms.

Efforts to Rebuild

While this discrimination caused immeasurable loss in the Black farm community, efforts to rebuild have been significant and laudable. Several organizations have been instrumental in addressing Black land loss and empowering Black farmers throughout the Southeast.

In 1967, the Federation of Southern Cooperatives Land Assistance Fund was chartered by 22 Black farm cooperatives to help limited resource communities produce a livable income and save their way of life. The Federation develops Black-owned cooperatives and credit unions for community development, protects and expands the landholdings of Black farmers throughout the South, and advocates for public policies that serve Black farmers and other low-income rural communities.

To find out more: FSC - Land Assistance Fund, 2769 Church St., East Point, GA 30344 #1-404-765-0991 www.federationsoutherncoop.com

The Land Loss Prevention

Project (LLPP) was founded in 1982 by the North Carolina Association of Black Lawyers to curtail epidemic losses of Black-owned land in North Carolina. LLPP broadened its mission in 1993 to provide legal support and assistance to all financially distressed and limited resource farmers and landowners in North Carolina.

To find out more: LLRP, P.O. Box 179, Durham, NC 27702 #1-800-672-5839 www.landloss.org