

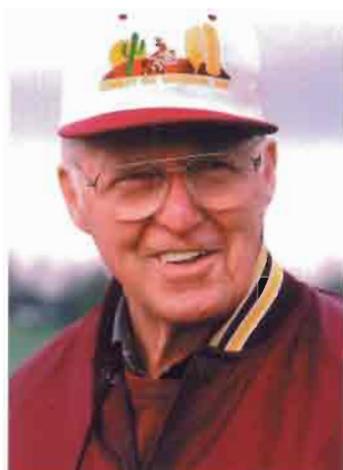


We can't turn the clock back

The population bomb has had one of the greatest human and ecological impacts of the 20th century. When I was born, 85 years ago, the world population stood at 1.6 billion. Today we are 6 billion in number, and growing by 100 million each year.

If we tried to produce the 1997 world cereal harvest using the prevailing 1960 technology, we would have needed 1.7 billion ha of land, instead of the 700 million ha currently in use today. Where would the additional 1 billion ha come from? How many forests would have had to be felled? How many grasslands and hillsides would have had to be ploughed up?

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**Dr Norman E Borlaug,
SAA President**

We cannot turn the clock back to the pre-1960s, and re-adopt the so-called "organic" approaches to crop production which were followed in an earlier day. Why? Because these lower yielding agricultural systems—albeit relatively stable—can only support three billion people. What would we do with the remaining three billion? It has only been advances in agricultural productivity that have allowed us to avoid human catastrophes of unimaginable dimensions.

The current backlash against science and technology, evident in some industrialised countries, is hard for me to comprehend. How quickly humankind becomes detached from the soil and agricultural production! Less than four per cent of society in

industrialised countries is engaged in agriculture. With low-cost food supplies and urban bias, it is no wonder that consumers do not understand the complexities of re-producing the world food supply each year in its entirety and expanding it, at a minimum, for the nearly 100 million new mouths that are born into this world annually.

The widespread "anti-science" campaign being orchestrated by extremist environmental groups is well-financed and frightening. They seem to want to stop the natural forces of evolution in its tracks, and to put our planet in the hands of a privileged well-fed elite. Although lacking in scientific credentials, their media skills are highly effective in preying on people's fears.

Consumers from these privileged nations are concerned about the safety of foods, despite generally living longer and healthier lives with each successive generation. If some consumers are prepared to pay the higher prices associated with the so-called "organically" grown crops and, if they can afford it, this is their choice to make.

However, in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), getting enough to eat can call on 70-80 per cent of a family's human and financial resources. Can these farmers afford "organically" grown food? And could they even use this method if they wanted to, especially when there is not enough manure, crop residues and farm power available to do high-yield organic farming.

SSA should adopt an "Agricultural Intensification Bill of Rights" stating that, by 2010, all farmers will have access to technologies that can (1) increase their incomes, (2) feed the population at the lowest possible cost, (3) integrate rural dwellers into the national market economy; and (4) encourage investments in rural resource conservation.

Africa's farmers are eager, willing, and able to double and triple yields. We have seen this clearly over the past 13 years in SG 2000. Moreover, with 60-80 per cent of

the population engaged in farming, productivity-led agricultural development will do much to stimulate their economies and reduce poverty, which in the end is the root cause of food insecurity.

Do not, I say to Africa's leaders, close your doors to the future benefits that biotechnology can bring your nations. Get your laws and regulatory procedures in order. Finally, continue to strive for strong publicly funded agricultural research systems which can provide farmers with continuing streams of new technology and can be made available with no royalties or patent charges.

I urge African policymakers not to be misled by the current prophesies of doom coming from extremist environmental groups, whose elitist leaders neither understand agricultural science nor the need to raise farmers' incomes substantially, as a precursor to increased investments in environmental conservation. As Richard Leakey likes to remind us, "You have to be well-fed to be a conservationist." Indeed, modern agricultural technology-improved seed, moderate amounts of fertiliser, and crop protection chemicals—is Africa's salvation, not its damnation!

About Sasakawa-Global 2000

Agricultural projects of Sasakawa-Global 2000 are operated as joint ventures of two organisations—Sasakawa Africa Association (SAA) and the Global 2000 programme of The Carter Center in Atlanta. SAA, whose president is Dr Norman E Borlaug, serves as the lead management organisation for the SG 2000 projects in Africa. Working through The Carter Center's Global 2000 programme, former US President Jimmy Carter and his advisers provide policy advice to national political leaders in support of programme objectives. Funding for SG 2000 projects comes from the Nippon Foundation whose chairperson is Ayako Sono and president is Yohei Sasakawa.