

# President Obama provides clear endorsement of agricultural biotechnology

By [Sara Wyant](#)

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WASHINGTON, April 15, 2014 - The dedication of Dr. Norman Borlaug's statue in the U.S. Capitol last month brought together an amazing array of Democrats and Republicans, united in highlighting his accomplishments in feeding the world. The event also prompted the president of the United States to give his clearest endorsement to date of the important role biotechnology plays in agriculture.

In an April 11 letter (see below) to Julie Borlaug which was obtained by *Agri-Pulse*, President Obama wrote about how pleased he was to join in celebrating her grandfather's life and his passion for feeding the hungry through biotechnology.

“I share his belief that investment in enhanced biotechnology is an essential component of the solution to some of our planet's most pressing agricultural problems,” Obama wrote. “Through our new regional climate change hubs, we will use the sorts of technologies pioneered by your grandfather to help farmers and ranchers face the climate challenges ahead.”

Borlaug dedicated his life to breeding better varieties of wheat, and worked with farmers, scientists, politicians and others to improve agricultural methods and policies to alleviate hunger and malnutrition worldwide. His achievements earned him recognition as the “Father of the Green Revolution” and the distinction of being the only American to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the Congressional Gold Medal and the National Medal of Science.

Norman Borlaug, who died in 2009, wrote to Obama in 2007 while the Illinois senator was running for office and the candidate responded with support for Borlaug's research and the role of biotechnology. But since his election, the president has been noticeably silent on the topic, much to the chagrin of biotechnology supporters - both within the U.S. and around the globe.

Obama's lack of public engagement on biotechnology - at least up to this point - has helped fuel opponents who oppose any biotechnology and often cite another set of his pre-election comments, in which he called for the labeling of products produced through the use of biotechnology, commonly called genetically-modified organisms or GMOs.

Yet, Obama wrote to Julie Borlaug as the debate over GMO products intensifies, with the introduction of several state ballot initiatives and federal legislation sponsored by Rep. Mike Pompeo, R.-Kan., and others that would pre-empt mandates for states labeling.

Obama supporters say that a stronger White House message on biotechnology has been quietly building in recent years and the letter to Julie Borlaug represents a culmination of several different events.

For example, starting with the G8 Camp David declaration in May 2012, world leaders committed to launch a New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition to accelerate the flow of private capital to African agriculture, “to take to scale new technologies and other innovations that can increase sustainable agricultural productivity, and reduce the risk borne by vulnerable economies and communities.”

In February 2013, Roger Johnson, president of the National Farmers Union; Bob Stallman, president of the American Farm Bureau Federation; James Greenwood, president of BIO, and representatives of Syngenta, DuPont, Monsanto, DowAgroSciences, Bayer, BASF and Agrivida met with White House Adviser Valerie Jarrett to discuss what they saw as the need for more White House leadership on the use of biotechnology in agriculture.

In the fall of 2013, the use of biotechnology in the global food system got another boost from a somewhat unlikely source: the Vatican.

Speaking at the World Food Prize (WFP) event honoring three biotechnology pioneers as WFP winners, Ghanaian Cardinal Peter Turkson provided a strong endorsement, noting that “Pope John Paul II was supportive of research in biotechnology to feed the world.”

Turkson said that, “in Catholic thought, then, ‘nature’ is neither sacred nor divine, neither to be feared nor revered and left untouched. . . . therefore it is legitimate for humans with the correct attitude to intervene in nature and make modifications.”

At about the same time, dozens of farm organizations and 30 universities wrote to commend the World Food Prize Foundation for its “unwavering support of science” and the selection of Marc Van Montagu, Mary-Dell Chilton and Robert Fraley as WFP winners.

Altogether, these different endorsements and events seemed to underscore the importance of biotechnology as well as the widespread political support needed to advance the president's focus on solving hunger at home and around the globe.

“The President's letter to Julie Borlaug and his clear statement on agriculture biotechnology is very important to the future of global food security,” said Marshall Matz with OFW Law. “In order to feed an exploding world population in the face of climate change, we need to make full use of all available science and technology.”

Borlaug's granddaughter Julie, who now serves as assistant director for external relations at the [Norman Borlaug Institute for International Agriculture](#), is clearly delighted with the letter.

“This is a huge endorsement of the importance of agriculture research and biotechnology,” she told *Agri-Pulse*. “My grandfather would have been grateful and appreciative of the president's focus on agriculture and climate change in an effort to feed the 9 billion people expected to live on this planet by 2050.”

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

April 11, 2014

Ms. Julie Borlaug  
College Station, Texas

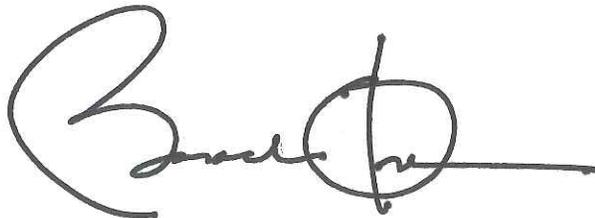
Dear Julie:

I am pleased to join in celebrating the life of your grandfather, Dr. Norman Borlaug. With unwavering commitment to feeding the hungry, leaders like your grandfather profoundly changed the way we develop food products that are accessible to the world's increasing population. The technological advances pioneered by Dr. Borlaug are a model of the American spirit of innovation and ingenuity. And above all, his support of investment in education and continued research in the biotechnology field are inspirational as we pursue developing new products that can nourish the world's vast population.

While I was running for President, your grandfather wrote to me about the importance of agricultural development. I share his belief that investment in enhanced biotechnology is an essential component of the solution to some of our planet's most pressing agricultural problems. Through our new regional climate change hubs, we will use the sorts of technologies pioneered by your grandfather to help farmers and ranchers face the climate challenges ahead. And I will continue to work with the Department of Agriculture and others to explore innovative solutions to address food security challenges and mitigate the effects of climate change.

The agricultural community is indebted to your grandfather's service, and our Nation will continue to engage in research and development in support of his life's mission to feed the world.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be Barack Obama's signature, written in a cursive style.