

THE KANSAS CITY STAR.

Monday, October 20, 2008

We need science if we are to feed the world



By **CLAYTON YEUTTER**

Ambassador Clayton Yeutter served as the U.S. secretary of agriculture from 1989 to 1991 and the U.S. trade representative from 1985 to 1988. The World Food Prize Foundation gives the World Food Prize, which is often referred to as the "Nobel Prize for Agriculture"

The work of Bob Dole and George McGovern, administered by the World Food Program with strong financial support from the United States, has been helping to feed millions of the world's poor.

The former senators recently received well-deserved recognition for their dedication to strengthen food and nutrition programs globally when they were awarded the World Food Prize.

Each year the World Food Prize honors those who have made particularly outstanding contributions in this area. Past recipients, and the award's founder, Nobel Prize winner Norman Borlaug, have contributed mightily to meeting this world's food needs.

But this year, as a host of countries have experienced protests, rioting and political instability caused by soaring food prices, the limits of our progress and the magnitude of our remaining challenges have become painfully clear.

The world will be simply unable to address the growing demand for food unless farmers everywhere are able to produce more, with greater efficiency.

The U.S. and other developed nations must substantially boost their long-term investments in agricultural research and technology, and nations throughout the world must cast aside their irrational objections to the acceptance and adoption of agricultural biotechnology.

Agricultural biotechnology became commercially available in 1996, and has since been used safely and successfully by thousands of farmers in the U.S. and 22 other countries. This major scientific advancement has made plants resistant to pests and diseases in ways that have never before been achieved, thereby also increasing crop yields.

Sadly, because of unwarranted political stigmatization and unfounded scientific criticism, public funding and regulatory approval for biotech crops has been stymied in many countries. Regrettably they are often developing countries, where these technological advancements are most urgently needed.

In many cases, developing countries recognize that biotechnology could reduce hunger in their own populations, but fear that they'll lose their export markets in countries — mainly in Europe — resistant to biotechnology.

The award of this year's World Food Prize is a good time to remind affluent countries that science marches on and that resistance to scientific advancement is a terrible disservice to millions of people for whom the cost and availability of food is literally a life-or-death matter.

It is also a disservice to the environment. In the absence of increased crop yields many countries have no choice but to convert uncultivated land into crop production. Biotechnology can play a huge role in avoiding that outcome.

We can best honor this year's World Food Prize Laureates by: (1) boosting agricultural research generally and biotechnology research specifically; (2) pursuing science-based regulatory decisions; (3) fostering the worldwide harmonization of scientific standards; and (4) moving beyond fear-mongering to rational decision-making.

If we are to achieve the Dole/McGovern goal of reducing global hunger, world leaders must embrace the opportunities that agricultural biotechnology can and will provide.

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The world will be simply unable to address the growing demand for food unless farmers everywhere are able to produce more, with greater efficiency.

The U.S. and other developed nations must substantially boost their farm income and stimulate rural economic development. Developing nations must substantially boost their agricultural research and technology, and reduce their irrational obstacles to rural biotechnology.

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If we are to achieve the Dole/McGovern goal of reducing global hunger, world leaders must embrace the opportunities that biotechnology can provide.