

**Norman Borlaug — A Celebrity Worth Remembering**

*By Lynne Finnerty*

Several celebrities have passed away this year. Dr. Norman Borlaug was the celebrity a lot of people never heard of. He did something much more important than entertain us. He fed the world.

Borlaug, 95, passed away on Sept. 12. The Iowa native leaves a legacy of saving hundreds of millions of people from starvation and advancing plant breeding technologies to help feed a growing population.

Shortly after graduating from the University of Minnesota, Borlaug in 1944 took a job with the Rockefeller Foundation doing plant research in rural Mexico. There he saw that, due to wheat rust, farmers could not produce enough even to sustain themselves. Borlaug and his team of researchers developed a disease-resistant variety and helped Mexico meet its food needs.

When the Rockefeller Foundation and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization saw what he accomplished, they presented Borlaug with an even bigger challenge—saving the Indian subcontinent from widespread starvation as harvests failed and population exploded. Borlaug and his team decamped to India and Pakistan, where they developed wheat varieties that produced four times as much grain as before. His technological breakthroughs, dubbed the Green Revolution, prevented certain famine for millions.

It didn't take long for Borlaug's Green Revolution to spread throughout the Middle East. His plant breeding methods were later applied to improving rice varieties in India and developing high-protein maize in Africa.

Borlaug also had to work to convince farmers in the developing world to trust him—a man who didn't look or sound anything like them—and take a chance on his technologies. A member of the wrestling team in college, he said that he often drew on lessons learned on the wrestling mat—lessons in courage and perseverance.

Borlaug received dozens of honors for his life-saving work, most notably the Nobel Peace Prize, as well as the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the Congressional Gold Medal. He could have rested on his laurels. Instead, up until the end of his life he continued his research as well as foundation work to reduce malnutrition in the developing world. Also, feeling that there should be something like a Nobel Prize for agriculture, he founded the World Food Prize to recognize others whose work enhances the global production and availability of food.

And he returned to the proverbial wrestling mat time and time again in support of continuing our advances through agricultural biotechnology. He grappled with what he believed to be the greatest threat to peace and progress—human hunger. Borlaug believed the only way to feed a growing world was to continue to increase food production. He generously allowed himself to become the world's most visible and respected spokesman in support of our biotechnology advances.

That more people aren't aware of Borlaug's achievements and how they have made us all more food-secure is a shame. That's why the American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture in 2008 selected a biography of Borlaug, *The Man Who Fed the World*, by Leon Hesser (2006), as its "Book of the Year."

As the end of this year approaches, the inevitable reflections will start on all the celebrities we've lost. Not to take anything away from anyone else, but Borlaug's Green Revolution has saved a large part of the world from a great human tragedy. If ever there was a life and legacy worth celebrating, it is that of Dr. Norman Borlaug.