



# THE WORLD FOOD PRIZE

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **The World Food Prize Recognizes Young Agricultural Scientist for Innovations in Sustainable Agriculture as Winner of the 2014 Norman Borlaug Award for Field Research and Application, Endowed by the Rockefeller Foundation**

**The third annual award recognizes researchers under 40 who emulate the scientific innovation and dedication to food security demonstrated by Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Dr. Norman Borlaug.**

(Washington, D.C.) September 18, 2014 – The World Food Prize announced today that the winner of its award for agricultural leaders under 40 to Dr. Bram Govaerts, a native of Belgium now working from Mexico, for his work developing leading-edge, sustainable programs that are transforming subsistence agriculture and unsustainable farming systems in Mexico and other regions of the world into productive and sustainable production operations. Dr. Govaerts' collaborative work with farmers has made it possible for smallholders in Mexico and other developing countries to escape hunger and poverty and improve their livelihoods.

Dr. Govaerts will be formally presented with the \$10,000 "Norman Borlaug Award for Field Research and Application, Endowed by the Rockefeller Foundation" on October 15, 2014, in Des Moines, Iowa, as part of this year's World Food Prize Borlaug Dialogue international symposium.

Dr. Govaerts, 35, currently serves as Associate Director of the Global Conservation Agricultural Program at the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT). The announcement of his selection was made by World Food Prize President Ambassador Kenneth Quinn at the USAID Frontiers in Development Forum on September 18 in Washington, D.C.

In developing his vision to help poor farmers increase food production from their existing farmland, Dr. Govaerts was inspired by the great agricultural scientist and World Food Prize Founder Norman Borlaug's credo: "Take It to the Farmer." To that end, Dr. Govaerts was instrumental in framing the Mexican government's major initiative known as the Sustainable Modernization of Traditional Agriculture (MasAgro), and, in June 2014, he assumed leadership of the entire program, with responsibility for coordinating the evolution of related projects in Latin America.

The component of MasAgro that Dr. Govaerts originally developed and has successfully led is named "Take It to the Farmer." It focuses on integrating technological innovation into small-scale farming systems for maize and wheat crops, while minimizing detrimental impacts on the environment. Under this extension-style program, farmers on over 94,000 hectares switched to sustainable systems using MasAgro technologies, while farmers on another 600,000 hectares are receiving training and information to improve their techniques and practices.

"Dr. Govaerts has used creative and innovative approaches in applying science to improving farming systems, to focus on farmers as development catalysts, and to restore a sense of pride among farmers and those who serve them," Quinn said. "Using cell phone technology and social media, YouTube videos and educational events, his work has led to impressive achievements in the adoption of his integrated technologies by farmers, policy changes at the governmental level, and institutional alignment for the implementation of conservation agriculture."

His passion for working with farmers to provide them with the full range of tools they need to rise out of subsistence farming is summed up by Dr. Govaerts: "The best recognition of Dr. Borlaug's legacy is to be conscious and shout out loud that farming is the future. It is our moral duty as researchers to bring pride back to the fields by harnessing the existing innovations of farmers and other value chain actors and fostering capacity and application of science and technology."

Dr. Govaerts' research and field application in conservation and sustainable agriculture has focused on the benefits of improving long-term soil quality in both irrigated and rain-fed regions through leaving surface residues on the land and reducing tillage activities while diversifying crops. Evidence gathered during his research has shown that when farmers used this method, crop yields increased on average in the rain fed areas by 30 to 40 percent and production costs fell by 10 percent in irrigated systems, resulting in a positive impact on household income.

Dr. Govaerts worked extensively in Ethiopia in a network of local universities and non-governmental organizations to extend conservation agriculture technologies for the smallholder farmers in the country's highland areas as part of his Ph.D. research. He has also developed close interactions with India in rice-wheat systems through active South-South exchange of remote sensing technologies and smart mechanization prototypes. Currently he supports efforts in Central America to apply the lessons learned from MasAgro's "Take it to The Farmer" to Guatemala and other countries through strong interactions with a local NGO and interactions with the local government institutions.

Dr. Govaerts has been a leader in putting into practice a vision for development and promotion of better agricultural practices to improve farmers' incomes and livelihoods, safeguard the environment and foster food security in the face of climate change. His energy and commitment inspire those around him, in the same way that Dr. Borlaug motivated and inspired colleagues, partners, policymakers and farmers.

**Quote from Dr. Bram Govaerts:**

"The best recognition of Dr. Borlaug's legacy is to be conscious and shout out loud that farming is the future. It is our moral duty as researchers to bring pride back to the fields by harnessing the existing innovations of farmers and other value chain actors and fostering capacity and application of science and technology, hence making agriculture sexier for future generations. Sustainable conservation agriculture-based systems will respond to the future's challenges if we can take advantage of existing technologies by proactively putting our needs forward to other sectors such as mechatronics, telecommunications, nanotechnology, big data, among others, but always recognizing farmers' needs first and the effective integration of the value chain."

**About the award:**

The award is funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, and administered by the World Food Prize. In 2011, during the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary World Food Prize Award Ceremony, Dr. Judith Rodin, President of the Rockefeller Foundation, announced a \$1 million contribution to the World Food Prize to endow the new award in honor of Dr. Borlaug, who did his groundbreaking research on improving wheat crops while working for the Rockefeller Foundation, and went on to found the World Food Prize. This year's announcement is especially momentous as we culminate the celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dr. Borlaug's birth. A downloadable photo of Dr. Govaerts can be found at [www.worldfoodprize.org/BorlaugHonoree](http://www.worldfoodprize.org/BorlaugHonoree).

**ABOUT THE NORMAN BORLAUG AWARD FOR FIELD RESEARCH AND APPLICATION, ENDOWED BY THE ROCKEFELLER**

**FOUNDATION:** An independent jury of experts chaired by Dr. Ronnie Coffman selected Dr. Govaerts from an impressive group of more than 40 candidates who were evaluated based on the attributes and accomplishments that reflect those demonstrated by Dr. Norman Borlaug during his work at the Rockefeller Foundation in developing high-yielding, disease-resistant wheat in Mexico and introducing adaptable wheat varieties into India and Pakistan during the 1950's and 60's, for which he received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970. Previous recipients of this award have been recognized from India and Kenya. More details at [www.worldfoodprize.org/borlaugfieldaward](http://www.worldfoodprize.org/borlaugfieldaward).

**ABOUT THE WORLD FOOD PRIZE:** The World Food Prize is the foremost international award recognizing the achievements of individuals who have advanced human development by improving the quality, quantity or availability of food in the world. The Prize was founded in 1986 by Dr. Norman E. Borlaug, recipient of the 1970 Nobel Peace Prize. Since then, the World Food Prize has honored 39 outstanding individuals who have made vital contributions throughout the world. The World Food Prize annually hosts the Borlaug Dialogue international symposium and a variety of youth education programs to help further the discussion on cutting-edge hunger and food security issues and inspire the next generation to end hunger. More at [www.worldfoodprize.org](http://www.worldfoodprize.org). Press credentials for covering the October World Food Prize Week of events can be requested at [www.worldfoodprize.org/credentials](http://www.worldfoodprize.org/credentials).

**ABOUT CIMMYT:**

Dr. Borlaug worked for many years on the joint Mexico-Rockefeller Foundation project (the Office of Special Studies) to improve agricultural production and food security in Mexico. When the Office of Special Studies ended, the work was taken on by the newly created International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT), where Borlaug served as Director of the Global Wheat Program for many years and served as a consultant until his death. Headquartered in Mexico, CIMMYT is the global leader in

research for development in wheat and maize and wheat- and maize-based farming systems. CIMMYT works throughout the developing world with hundreds of partners to sustainably increase the productivity of maize and wheat systems to improve global food security and livelihoods.