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Appreciating the Norm Borlaug Documentary 'Freedom From Famine' All Over Again

By Gil Ross — August 25, 2015

It is, of course, quite understandable that The American Council on Science and Health has been a devoted fan of our late co-founder, Dr. Norman Borlaug, at least since our origin in 1978. He painstakingly studied plant breeding methods, which he improved month by month, planting season by season in Mexico, amidst the impoverished.

But, given his immense contributions to plant breeding science and his fervent devotion, even in his later years, to the cause of scientific and technological progress against hunger and starvation, it is amazing to us that his humanitarian efforts are so little-known, to the public and even to scientists.

That's why we here at ACSH are once again calling attention to a short documentary titled "Freedom From Famine: The Norman Borlaug Story," which highlights a lifetime of life-saving work and his fervent devotion to eliminating global starvation.

Dr. Borlaug developed new wheat types that would withstand climate variations including winds and drought, as well as infestations of devastating wheat rust disease. Serendipitously, he also discovered that by moving his headquarters a distance away at a high elevation, he could actually study two growing seasons instead of one during several months. He worked in the same dirt-poor conditions as the farm workers.

Dr. Borlaug's work eventually was credited with saving approximately one billion lives from starvation, initially in Latin America and then South Asia. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970, and subsequently received other awards and honors for his lifesaving efforts.
is a labor of love (or admiration, at least) by The Mathile Institute for the Advancement of Human Nutrition, and the film makers, Gay and Phil Courter. It was first released in 2009, when Dr. Borlaug’s died at the age of 95.

Here's the Institute's accompanying message:

*Americans have little knowledge of one of their greatest sons. Why do schoolchildren in China, India, Mexico and Pakistan know the name and work of Nobel Peace Prize winner Norman Borlaug, while so few of his countrymen have never heard of him? How did a dirt-poor farm boy from rural Iowa grow up to save a billion people worldwide from starvation and malnutrition and become the father of the Green Revolution? What were the inherited traits and environmental factors that shaped his astonishing journey and led to successes that surprised even him? What can we learn from his life and views that might help the human race survive the next critical century? This documentary film is a must-see for anyone interested in American history, world hunger, plant breeding, agriculture and biotechnology.*

This hour-long film is fascinating; it contains filmed portrayals of The Green Revolution's beginnings in Mexico, and its stop-and-start export to India and Pakistan, replete with political and bureaucratic maneuverings that Dr. Borlaug had to become as well-versed in as he had with the agronomic technology. Against his natural proclivities, he did it. And millions upon millions of lives were saved.

(And, if that's not enough, he introduced Little League Baseball to Mexico!)

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