

Opening Keynote Address: A New Global Era for Higher Education in Agriculture

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The Global Consortium of Agricultural Universities of which this conference is a part, is the result of some big dreams.

It is the result of people who dream of a very different world than the one with which we have struggled throughout much of our human existence. They dream of a world not of contradiction and conflict but of cooperation and collaboration. Their dream is the dream of the different people of the world coming together in a truly global community.

It is not a new dream. It goes back to the earliest civilizations—indeed, as far back as the different peoples of the world have had the capacity to look beyond their own borders and dream of what could be. People such as Socrates, who, some 2,400 years ago, observed, “I am not an Athenian or a Greek. I am a citizen of the world.” But as we all know, transforming our world from one of many peoples and many nations into a world of one community takes more than dreaming—much more than dreaming.

I am reminded of an old verse that has become one of my favorites. I do not know where it originated or who wrote it. All I know is that the words are inscribed on a plaque hanging on a wall of an old church in England. I don't know which church it is but probably some of you do. The words inscribed on it are these:

*A vision without task is but a dream.
A task without vision is drudgery.
A vision and a task are the hope of the world.*

Creating this new world—making the dream of a global community become real—requires vision and task. More importantly, it requires people who have this rare combination of skills: dreamer and taskmaster; visionary and laborer. In addition, they need one other very special and very important quality, and that is the ability to be a leader. And not just any kind of leader, but an effective and inspirational leader. Vision, task, the courage and conviction to follow the vision, the ability to inspire and lead others in working toward the vision, and the skill to work effectively in making the vision become real: this is indeed a rare combination.

So when you find someone like this, you want to listen to them and you want others to listen to them, as many people as possible. That is why we have invited all of you here, to this conference on Leadership for Higher Education in Agriculture. Building this global community will take lots of people, and most importantly, lots of leaders.

There has never been a more propitious—or more urgent—time to build this global community. It is propitious because the character of the world itself is changing, away from separation and isolation and toward openness. Things that were built on separation and control are crumbling: the Berlin Wall, controlled economies, and controlled lives. These are being replaced by new governments, new institutions, and new agreements: more democracies, more free trade agreements, and more educational and research exchanges, all leading to a greater openness between our national, economic, and cultural entities. Barriers that kept people, ideas, and goods out are being replaced with bridges to bring these things, along with understanding in.

The need to create this global community is urgent because we have never before faced challenges of the magnitude that we face today. They are truly global challenges in size and scale especially for the business we are all in which is ensuring that this community can continue producing the most basic of all human necessities—food.

Our population is growing at an alarming rate, one that threatens the planet's ability to sustain itself. Not until 150 years ago—in 1850—did the world's population reach one billion. It took just 80 more years for it to double to 2 billion and just 45 years to double again to 4 billion, a milestone that was reached in 1975. Today, less than 25 years after reaching 4 billion, the population has just topped 6 billion and estimates are that it will reach 8 billion by the year 2020. These are staggering numbers.

And not only is the population growing but advances in technology and the emergence of global economic markets are giving people the resources to aspire to a higher standard of living. We face yet another challenge in that population growth is not uniformly distributed around the world. Therefore, our resource distribution systems—such as those for food—while adequate for some parts of the world are woefully inadequate for others. This combination of a constantly escalating population and the desire for a better quality life is putting tremendous strain on our environment to produce the food to sustain this growing population and to provide the other resources that are needed to attain a higher standard of living, such as better building materials, clothing, and energy to make our living environments more comfortable. This has significant implications for agriculture which uses 70 percent of one of the world's most precious and limited resources—fresh water. These are challenges of global perspective and global scale, which is why there has never been a more urgent need for the people of the world to begin coming together and to begin acting globally.

At last year's international conference on higher education in agriculture, held in conjunction with the 100th anniversary of the National Agricultural University of Ukraine, I urged that we, as leaders of the educational and scientific community—a community that has long recognized the need to think and work globally—need to step forward once again. We need to take the lead in addressing these daunting challenges of feeding the world's growing population and in ensuring the sustainability of our food production resources and capabilities. Several of us, including my friend and colleague, Dr. Dmytro Melnychuk, called for the agricultural higher education community to develop an agenda that works to bring our institutions together in cooperative and collaborative initiatives and that builds on these initiatives to bring all of our nations and peoples together in actions that begin addressing the challenges that we face.

Among the items that need to be included in such an agenda are the following. First, we must learn to share: share resources, share ideas, and, most importantly, share knowledge. The esteemed scientist Robert Oppenheimer wrote, "...the unrestricted access to knowledge, the unplanned and uninhibited association of (people) for its furtherance—these are what may make a vast, complex, ever-growing, ever-changing, ever more specialized and expert technological world, nonetheless a world of human community." (*Science and the Common Understanding*, 1953)

Related to the idea of sharing is a second agenda item: We must work through partnerships—strengthening existing partnerships, and seeking out new partnerships.

We also must identify areas of common ground and common understanding and from these, begin to develop programs that we can all support. In the area of agricultural higher education, we need to increase our understanding of each other's curricular structures and from there work toward greater common ground so that our students will be able to expand their educations by moving easily between and among our institutions. Identifying areas of common ground and common understanding is also of primary importance as we develop our research agendas for the future to identify both broader, overarching issues that have global impact and areas within these issues where each of our institutions

brings special expertise. After doing this, we must look for new opportunities to work collaboratively on these issues and to put our scientific and technological resources to use to meet the needs of the world's people.

There are many other items that could, and should, be included in this agenda and we all need to be involved in its development. However, the overall goal of this agenda, I believe, must be to build our capacity for collaboration—a global capacity for collaboration.

These issues clearly pointed to the need for a new global organization to begin building our capacity for collaboration, and the result was the creation of this organization—the Global Consortium of Agricultural Universities. The mission of the consortium is to foster global cooperation for the improvement of higher education and research for agriculture as a prerequisite to solving food security and environmental problems confronting our world. It was immediately decided that this consortium would be as open and inclusive as possible; would involve as many participants, from as many parts of the world, as possible; and would keep the cost of participation as low as possible to further encourage broad participation. Our consortium is still quite young—less than one year—and it continues to evolve.

One decision that was made early on was the methodology to be employed by the consortium in carrying out its mission. It is the one we all use in carrying out our own individual missions, and that is education. We will educate by conducting international scientific conferences on topics of critical importance—with this conference on leadership being the first—and by sharing international models of curricula and assisting in curricular reform and alignment.

In addition, we have pledged to support the activities of existing international organizations that already are at work on these issues. These agencies include the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the European Association of Agrarian Universities, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the United States Information Agency (USIA), and others.

As we discussed the topics of critical importance that this consortium should consider first, one quickly rose to the surface. That is leadership. Reform cannot happen without effective leadership. The kind of reform we are envisioning—the building of a more global community—requires a special kind of leadership, for while much of the world is changing, many parts are changing very slowly or not at all. And it is in these parts of the world where the change is most critically needed so that people in these areas can also join as full partners in the world community that is being built and benefit from the growth and progress it will generate.

Circumstances in many parts of the world work against change, most significantly, political circumstances and economic circumstances. That is where leadership becomes most critical—especially leaders who have the ability to work in these difficult circumstances and environments.

For this conference, we have assembled a group of people who have remarkable abilities as leaders in reform. They combine not only vision, task, and inspiration, but they bring other qualities that enable them to work and be successful in particularly difficult circumstances and environments. They are survivors, and they are entrepreneurs. They know that to accomplish reform, they must be able to function effectively in many different circles in their nations and regions: the academic circles, the political circles, the business circles, and the social and cultural circles. They know that reform means change and change requires broad support. They also know that it takes money to institute reform and they have become particularly adept at knowing where to find it, which significantly increases their effectiveness as leaders.

We have invited several of these entrepreneurial leaders to this conference to share their stories, experiences, and lessons as case studies. These speakers—Dr. Dmytro Melnychuk of Ukraine, Dr. C. Peter Magrath of the United States, Dr. Jiaan Cheng of the Peoples Republic of China, Dr. Ladislav Kabat of Slovakia, Dr. Fakhry Shousha of Egypt, Dr. Ramon de la Peña of Mexico, and Dr. Zachary Kasomekera of Malawi—represent many different parts of the world and many different circumstances and environments for reform.

In addition, we are honored to have as keynote speakers Dr. Csaba Csaki of the World Bank and Dr. Richard Foster of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to provide their global perspectives on world development as well as the opportunities that their organizations present to support development. It is our hope that we can all learn something from each of them that will help us strengthen our own reform efforts in our own nations, reforms that will benefit our institutions but more importantly, reforms that will lead to growth and progress for the people we serve and who rely on us to ensure that they will have an adequate and safe supply of food for the future. For as Woodrow Wilson, one of the architects of the League of Nations, noted some 80 years ago, “Hunger does not breed reform; it breeds madness and all ugly distempers that make an ordered life impossible.” (Speech to the U.S. Congress, November 11, 1918)

That ordered life—today we would call it peace—is, after all, the ultimate goal of what we are doing. It is the goal of the consortium and all of our partners—UNESCO, USAID, the World Bank, the Farm Foundation, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation—as well as, I believe, the personal goal of everyone here. To achieve peace, we need to institute reform; and to institute reform, we need leaders.

John F. Kennedy said, “It’s time for a new generation of leadership, to cope with new problems and new opportunities. For there is a new world to be won.” (Television address, July 4, 1960) And although I believe those words are still very applicable today, I would offer one small change to what Mr. Kennedy said, and that is this:

**For there is a new world order
to be built. Welcome, dreamers
and builders of our
new world order.**