

LAUREATE AWARD CEREMONY

Shakuntala Haraksingh Thilsted – 2021 World Food Prize Laureate

October 21, 2021 | 8:00 p.m.

Introduction

Please join me in welcoming past World Food Prize Laureates:

The 2010 Laureate — Rev. David Beckmann from the United States

The 2016 Laureate from the United States — Dr. Jan Low

Please welcome from the State of Iowa:

Lieutenant Governor of the State of Iowa — Adam Gregg

Please welcome the former President and President Emeritus of the World Food Prize Foundation:

Ambassador Kenneth F. Quinn

Seated in the Chamber, the World Food Prize Council of Advisors — and if you'd please stand to be recognized:

Please welcome the World Food Prize Laureate Party:

Chair of the World Food Prize Selection Committee — Dr. Gebisa Ejeta

Chairman of the World Food Prize Council of Advisors — Mr. Paul Schickler

President of the World Food Prize Foundation — Ms. Barbara Stinson

Please give a special welcome to the 2020 World Food Prize from India and the United States:

Dr. Rattan Lal

Please welcome the 2021 World Food Prize Laureate from Trinidad and Tabago of Denmark:

Dr. Shakuntala Haraksingh Thilsted

Presiding at tonight's ceremony, please welcome the Governor of the state of Iowa:

The Honorable Kim Reynolds

Please welcome two distinguished guests of honor:

Secretary of Agriculture from Mexico — His Excellency Victor Villalobos

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture and former Governor of Iowa and

Member of the World Food Prize Council of Advisors — The Honorable Tom Vilsack

There can be no permanent progress in the battle against hunger until the agencies that fight for increased food production and those that fight for population control unite in a common effort. Fighting alone, they may win temporary skirmishes – but united they can win a decisive and lasting victory to provide food and other amenities of a progressive civilization for the betterment of all mankind.

Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the President of the World Food Prize Foundation, Barbara Stinson.

Barbara Stinson

President, World Food Prize Foundation

To everyone here this evening and to all those thousands dialing in, viewing us by webcast around the globe, welcome, welcome to the 2021 World Food Prize Laureate Award Ceremony. Secretary Villalobos, Secretary Vilsack, thank you for the great honor of having you here with us tonight.

Governor Reynolds, on behalf of our Board Chair, Paul Schickler, and my husband Don, the entire Ruan family, and all of us at the World Food Prize Foundation, I want to say how grateful we are to you and to the First Gentleman Kevin Reynolds for presiding over tonight's ceremony. (There he is.) Thank you for the privilege of holding our ceremony here in this magnificent Iowa State Capitol over the last 22 years. It is my special honor to be here for my very first in-person ceremony.

Tonight we honor our 2021 World Food Prize Laureate. She has truly improved the lives of millions around the globe, particularly in the Global South.

But first I want to acknowledge that we all feel a significant absence tonight. With great sorrow our community has lost a true humanitarian and a wonderful leader. Our Foundation Chairman, John Ruan III. To Janis, Rachel, John IV, and the entire Ruan family, our hearts are with you. Our gratitude extends to all of you for all you've done to support the World Food Prize for many decades.

John Ruan III assumed leadership of the World Food Prize Foundation as chairman in 2000. He succeeded his father. The World Food Prize grew enormously in 21 years of leadership under his direction and because of his and the family's generosity. Now the annual \$250,000 award for fighting hunger is considered to be the most significant internationally recognized award for food and agriculture and our youth programs, which began in 1994 with 13 Iowa students have blossomed to over 5,000 students engaging every year. John guided me. He supported me through changes needed in the global pandemic – nothing we could have anticipated. His wisdom, generosity and passion for ending hunger will be so missed, and they reside with me forever.

We are humbled to dedicate this entire week's Dialogue and activities, the Award Ceremony tonight to John Ruan III. And in honor of that, all of us at the Foundation wanted to create a very special tribute in memory of John.

Barbara Stinson:

I first met John Ruan III two years ago during the recruitment for my position here at the World Food Prize Foundation. I was immediately inspired by his quiet determination and his powerful vision for this organization. So it was an honor to take up the responsibility, and it was particularly an honor to work with John for 18 months or so. His vision of the next generation of the World Food Prize was fantastic. It was driven and guided by all that he and my predecessor had done for two decades. But it was also looking at the evolution of where we can go further in feeding the world and elevating those who feed the world.

For almost a century John Ruan Senior and his son, John Ruan III, with their families, have provided sustained, exceptional leadership in countless ways. They built one of the largest, most successful transportation companies in America and also brought Bankers Trust to Central Iowa. They demonstrated transformative civic leadership to the Greater Des Moines community through numerous development and beautification projects. And they rescued the World Food Prize, developing and shaping it over time into the most significant international award for combating hunger and enhancing global food security.

Ambassador Ken Quinn

Every month I would have a meeting with John, and I would come up to the Des Moines Club to see him. We'd have lunch. And instead of sitting over kind of in the high visibility section, John liked to have a small table off to the side. He wasn't always looking for the spotlight. And we'd sit there and talk about issues we have, and he would give me that guidance that was so critical. So I knew I had his support and I had his vision of where he saw the World Food Prize going.

Starting with just one used truck in 1932, John Ruan Senior rose to become chairman of an array of highly successful Ruan family businesses, including Ruan Transportation Management Systems, which is now led by Ben McLean and employs over 5,100 team members, operating the nationwide fleet of over 5,000 trucks and trailers. Bankers Trust, the largest privately owned community bank in Iowa, with over \$5 billion in assets; and Iowa Export Import Trading Company, involving over 50 nations.

Well, John and his father, they impacted me by saying, "You can give and it doesn't hurt." And when John, who could have done anything with the wealth that they've established, and he wanted to do it in Des Moines with the beautification with the library, with the World Food Prize, with everything else they've done. He loved Des Moines, and he made this surely his one, number one charity – Iowa.

From 2001 until his illness and death on September 11th, 2021, John Ruan III succeeded his father, building the Ruan Companies and Bankers Trust to even greater prominence. He received national recognition for his business leadership when he served as Chairman of the Board of the United States Chamber of Commerce. John Ruan III served as Chairman of the World Food Prize Foundation for two decades. Under his direction, the annual \$250,000 award for increasing the quality, quantity and availability of food for all, attracted participation of two Secretaries General of the United Nations as well

as press from Europe, Africa and Latin America. Through his vision and diligent support, the World Food Prize became recognized globally as the Nobel Prize for food and agriculture.

I have known John Ruan and his family for a long time, primarily through the community and all their wonderful contributions to the community. But my close engagement with John began with the World Food Prize about 15 years ago, and that has resulted in a long connection and a very dedicated connection to the World Food Prize. But the greatest impact that John made on my life and with the World Food Prize is his dedication to the Youth Institute. I too have been dedicated to the Youth Institute, and I look forward to carrying on that vision long into the future, in memory of John.

John's strength of character and powerful determination will be remembered most. He was a quiet man but spoke passionately about the critical importance of the mission of the World Food Prize. John believed in all of the work of the Foundation, including the Dialogues, Youth Programs, and especially the annual Laureate Award Ceremony, which he officiated alongside the Governor of Iowa many times in the Iowa Capitol. John was the visionary driving force behind the restoration of the Des Moines Public Library, turning it into the international headquarters for the World Food Prize Foundation.

In 2001 he announced that the Ruan family would provide \$5 million to support transforming the century-old Des Moines Public Library into the World Food Prize Hall of Laureates. At that time, the west side of the library served as a parking lot. Mr. Ruan's vision was to create an urban oasis of greenery along the Des Moines River. When the Hall of Laureates and surrounding public gardens were unveiled in 2011 at the time of the Foundation's 25th anniversary, they became a meaningful and treasured part of the Principal River Walk. Also under John's leadership, the Hall of Laureates attained Lead Platinum Certification, the highest possible level of energy efficiency and resource conservation, making the historic building a national landmark of environmental preservation.

In October 2016 on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the World Food Prize, the flourishing garden at the Hall of Laureates was officially dedicated and named the Janis and John Ruan III garden. John and his family are dedicated to the fight to end hunger around the world. His work and their legacy are enshrined in the Norman E. Borlaug Hall of Laureates.

When I think about John Ruan, frankly I think about a legend in this community of Des Moines. I've known him for a lot of years and worked with him on a variety of different projects, but the number one thing I always think about when I think of John is family – his commitment to Janis and certainly the kids, John IV and Rachel – and the vital and important role that they played in his life. When I think about the very building we're sitting in, it wouldn't be here without John Ruan. Clearly, the World Food Prize has been a hallmark of the city, of the region, of the country, and frankly of the world. And John's continued advocacy, support and stressing the importance of food and food production and making sure everyone's needs around the world are served, is humbling in my own heart. So to the family, to the community, my tribute on behalf of the Principal Financial Group and myself, personally – Thank you for everything you've done to make us a greater community. You are missed, my friend. Rest in peace.

Governor Kim Reynolds

As the chairman of Ruan Transportation, John Ruan III helped build his family business from the ground up. What started as a single gravel hauling truck in 1932 has become a nationally recognized and respected enterprise with 5,600 team members and more than 300 operations nationwide. As chairman of

the World Food Prize Foundation, John helped bring greater awareness to world hunger while also highlighting Iowa's rightful place as the food and agricultural capital of the world. In addition to these prominent leadership roles at Ruan Transportation and the World Food Prize Foundation, John served as chairman of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors, and he also dedicated tremendous time and effort at the Iowa Business Council, the Greater Des Moines Partnerships and the Downtown Community alliance to further expand economic opportunity and growth in Iowa. Kevin and I extend our deepest sympathies to Janis and their entire family. And we join with Iowans from across the state to mourn his passing and recognize his distinguished life of accomplishments and success that will continue to be felt far beyond the borders of our state.

The World Food Prize Foundation will forever honor and recognize the incredible commitment and work of this amazing humanitarian. They are devoted to preserving the legacy of John Ruan III and the entire Ruan family.

Barbara Stinson

I hear his voice in my head and his quiet determination, his diligence, and his very thoughtful leadership. It's just been an honor to work with John in the period that I got to do that. It's been an honor to work with the family and support the family, and my heart goes out to all of them in this difficult time.

This year the World Food Prize annual events are dedicated to the memory of John Ruan III, his devotion to the community of Des Moines, and his lifetime passion for ending hunger around the globe.

Barbara Stinson

Thank you. So 14 years ago Norman Borlaug left us as well. Beginning with the 2009 ceremony, my predecessor, Ambassador Ken Quinn left open the chair that Norm always occupied. We continue that tradition to commemorate Dr. Norman Borlaug's achievements and inspiration. And tonight I also want to similarly honor the chair that was occupied by John for two decades. We leave John's chair, remembering that there would not be a World Food Prize without the generosity of John and the Ruan family.

Now we take a moment to reflect and honor our four World Food Prize Laureates who passed this year as well.

He Kang was honored as the 7th World Food Prize Laureate and the first Chinese laureate, for instituting reforms as China's Minister of Agriculture, which were the foundation of the nation's agricultural growth in the 1980s. Under his leadership, agriculture and productivity increased 8% annually, farm income tripled, rural poverty dramatically decreased, and China became self-sufficient in food for the first time in modern history.

Professor Yuan Longpin was honored as the 2004 World Food Prize Laureate. Professor Yuan Longpin was honored as the 2004 World Food Prize Laureate, with co-Laureate Monty P. Jones, for developing the

research and technology that he used to breed the first hybrid rice varieties ever created. As the "Father of Hybrid Rice," Professor Yuan helped transform China from food scarcity to greater food security.

Dr. Daniel Hillel was honored as the 2012 World Food Prize Laureate for his role in convincing and implementing a radical new mode of delivering water to crops in arid and dry regions, called "micro-irrigation." Hillel's pioneering scientific work in Israel revolutionized food production, first in the Middle East, and then in other regions around the world over the past five decades. His work laid the foundation for maximizing efficient water usage in agriculture, increasing crop yields, and minimizing environmental degradation.

Dr. Sanjaya Rajaram was honored as the 2014 Laureate for impacting the lives of hundreds of millions of people with the development of high-yielding and disease-resistant wheat varieties grown on more than 58 million hectares throughout the world. His achievement increased global wheat production by more than 200 million tons during his lifetime in diverse regions across the globe.

The world was forever changed by these four laureates, and their presence is greatly missed in this chamber this evening.

Barbara Stinson

And now we want to move to the main events for the evening, and to do so I want to welcome our highest-ranking U.S. Government official in the audience tonight. To the podium, please, we have the pleasure of welcoming the Honorable Thomas Vilsack, Secretary of Agriculture and former Governor of Iowa.

Honorable Thomas Vilsack

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture; former Governor, State of Iowa

Governor Reynolds and President Stinson and laureates past and present, as well as the Ruan family. I'd like just simply to add my personal level of respect and admiration for John and let you know that his legacy is instilled in every single one of the young people who have been impacted by the World Food Prize and the youth programs that he and Ken Quinn started. And I want you to know that is a living legacy that will make a difference in the lives of hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people. And he will certainly be missed.

And I want to thank all of you for being here tonight. It's certainly an honor for us to be here in the State Capitol. And now more than ever it's important for us to acknowledge and carry on the legacy of Dr. Norman Borlaug and John Ruan. We all know we're facing many challenges in agriculture, and we've been impacted by a pandemic, which consequently has really revealed vulnerabilities in our food systems and caused disruption in our supply chains. More than ever we need to create a food system of the future that is fair, competitive, distributive, and resilient and that delivers greater value and better markets to our farmers and to our consumers.

Climate change in the form of severe and prolonged drought, intense and raging wildfires, and destructive and life-threatening storms and floods continue to threaten our farmers and our communities both rural and urban. We continue to witness a growing population, coupled with deepening world food insecurity. As we all know, Dr. Borlaug worked to tackle one of these

challenges himself – how to create a higher-yielding wheat variety that would survive disease in a variety of environments. I know that his work inspired many of you here today.

However, I want to touch today on the next generation of bright minds, employing science, technology and innovation, so that we can continue to feed, clothe and fuel the world and do it in a way that is socially, environmentally and economically sustainable.

Yesterday my good friend, Secretary Villalobos and I visited Iowa State University, and we witnessed firsthand some of the research students and professors who are working on the change necessary to produce a more productive agriculture. From measuring nitrogen levels in the soil to using artificial intelligence to more efficiently care for crops, to seed technologies that help produce more with less, these young minds are innovating a path forward that would make Norm Borlaug very proud. This work is happening in colleges and universities across the United States and I have no doubt across the world.

At USDA we work closely with the World Food Prize to carry on Norman Borlaug's legacy through two programs – through the Norman E. Borlaug International Agricultural Science and Technology Fellowship Program, the USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service has sponsored more than 900 Borlaug fellows from 69 countries. The program provides training and collaborative research opportunities to early and career scientists, researchers and policymakers from developing and middle-income countries, with a focus on agricultural production, food security, trade and economic growth.

I also want to highlight USDA's partnership with the World Food Prize and the Wallace Carver Fellowship, which offers college students the opportunity to collaborate with our scientists and policymakers through fellowships at the USDA research centers and offices across the United States.

When I think of our great agricultural leaders, Henry Wallace, George Washington Carver, and Norm Borlaug, all of them made significant strides toward ending hunger. My hope is that, through these hundreds of fellows from these two programs, we're training and inspiring the next generation of leaders who will follow in their footsteps – leaders who understand the importance of science, technology and innovation, leaders who bring passion to feeding the world and doing so sustainably while taking care of our land and our planet, leaders who know that it's time for concerted, collaborative action and will act with an urgency necessary to address our nation and our world's greatest challenges. I have no doubt we will see at least one of these fellows standing here someday accepting this great award.

I now have the honor of recognizing the 50th World Food Prize Laureate, Dr. Rattan Lal. This 2020 laureate from Ohio State University is recognized for developing and mainstreaming a soil-centric approach that increases food production while restoring and conserving our natural resources and mitigating climate change. Dr. Lal, I think he epitomizes Norman Borlaug's philosophy that science is meaningless if it does not serve humanity. Please join me in thanking Dr. Lal for all that he has done in his lifetime of commitment to improving and restoring the soils in the face of unprecedented challenges, which will mean that we will continue to have productive agriculture here and around the world. Thank you very much.

Barbara Stinson

Thank you, Secretary Vilsack. To continue to highlight another special guest tonight, I want to mention the Borlaug family, Dr. Borlaug's family. His daughter Jeanie Borlaug Laube, his son Bill and his granddaughter Julie have supported the World Food Prize so consistently over all these years since its founding. Julie Borlaug is here with us tonight. She's a guest, and I especially wish to thank you, Julie, for your career of work devoted to the advancements in feeding the world. And we are honored to welcome you as a member of the Council of Advisors of the World Food Prize.

And now we turn to our guest of honor, Dr. Shakuntala Haraksingh Thilsted. Congratulations and welcome to Iowa, at last! Shakuntala is recognized tonight for her devotion to improving the lives of millions through groundbreaking research and her holistic and nutrition-sensitive approaches in aquatic foods. She has worked tirelessly to try to ensure nutrition for all, by bringing together interdisciplinary and international collaborators. She drove the delivery of improved nutrition, resilient ecosystems, and improved livelihoods for millions of vulnerable people around the globe.

To launch the Laureate Award presentation, we turn to the Laureate Proclamation. We have the honor of not only being in the Governor's house but of having the governor of the state of Iowa to offer the 2021 Laureate's Proclamation. Kim Reynolds, Iowa's first female governor, has been a wonderful friend to the World Food Prize – as governor and as lieutenant governor before that. And she's been a true support to me during my tenure and through a global pandemic. She officiates our Iowa Youth Institute, our Iowa Hunger Summit, and also the Laureate Award Ceremony. Governor Reynolds, I thank you.

To issue the official Laureate Proclamation, it is my great privilege to introduce the 43rd governor of Iowa, the Honorable Kim Reynolds.

Kim Reynolds

Governor, State of Iowa

Thank you, thank you, Barbara, and thank you for your leadership as president of the World Food Prize. And I couldn't be more optimistic about the Foundation's future under your leadership. Secretaries, and on behalf of the people of Iowa, it is my pleasure to extend a warm welcome to each of you. It's an honor to share this historic chamber with the leaders in the global fight against hunger. In a moment I'll have the privilege to recognize our newest World Food Prize Laureate.

But first I want to take a moment to acknowledge our distinguished attendees. Every October the World Food Prize brings the world to Iowa with a diverse and accomplished group of international officials, government ministers, NGO leaders, agribusiness executives, research scientists, farmers, teachers and high school students – all who share the transformative vision of the great Norman Borlaug to alleviate hunger across the globe through innovation, education and empowerment. And that's at the very core of the World Food Prize, and it all began with a disruptive-thinking scientist and teacher who worked side by side with those he taught, cultivating the skills to feed themselves and change their world.

This year we're also joined, albeit virtually, by the exceptional high schoolers from around the world participating in the Global Youth Institute, which is one of my favorite traditions tied to the World Food Prize. It embodies Dr. Borlaug's vision to educate young people on global food security and inspire more students to pursue careers in agricultural science and technology. We're so fortunate that the World Food Prize youth programs have grown so successfully here in Iowa and around the world. And I add my congratulations to the students and teachers that will be recognized.

Over three decades ago in 1990, John Ruan Senior and Dr. Borlaug moved the World Food Prize to Iowa. As America's powerhouse when it comes to food production, the match seemed fitting – and they were right. Along with our partners in the private sector and higher education, the state of Iowa and the World Food Prize have worked together seamlessly ever since. And I would like to express my great appreciation for the Ruan family and their incredible support of this award. Sadly, as we know, we lost John Ruan III a little over a month ago. And it was under his leadership the World Food Prize grew from a small, one-day local gathering into a full week packed with noteworthy ceremonies, deliberations and conversations, all dedicated to achieving global food security. It draws over 1500 participants to Des Moines annually and more than 65 countries, and probably more than that as we're virtual this year – we've extended that even further.

But because of John's generosity, the annual \$250,000 award for global hunger has come to be known internationally as the Nobel Prize for food and agriculture. What an amazing testament to his leadership. In 2021 the World Food Prize Foundation is dedicating the week of events to John Ruan III. His legacy and memory will not be forgotten. We are truly grateful for all of John's contributions, not only to the World Food Prize but to the state of Iowa as well.

And to our newest laureate, I am so pleased to add my congratulations to your selection to receive the most significant recognition in global food security. Your groundbreaking research into agriculture and nutrition has truly been transformative, profoundly affecting the lives of countless people around the world for the better. And with that and through the official proclamation, I now proclaim Dr. Thilsted the 2021 World Food Prize Laureate. Congratulations.

In 1949 the Indian mathematician and author Shakuntala Davie, visited the Caribbean island nation of Trinidad and Tabago, a young woman prodigy in a field dominated by men, Davie was an inspiration to many. She became the namesake of a girl born in Trinidad in the same year of her visit, who, like Davie, would go on to great achievements in science, promoting good nutrition and strong development for all children.

Born in the Caribbean Island of Trinidad in the small village of Reform, Shakuntala Haraksingh Thilsted grew up in a four-generation household where the kitchen was the heart of the home. Her grandmother presided over cooking meals for the family and instilled in young Shakuntala an appreciation for good food and its importance for good health. It was her grandmother who first imparted to her the importance of fish for nutrition.

Shakuntala Thilsted

I remember the time one of my uncles won the island scholarship, and my grandmother was interviewed by the national newspaper. I don't remember all of what she said, but I remember clearly her saying, "Well, my child is intelligent because I fed him fish when he was a young child." And that stuck with me.

Thilsted attended Naparima Girls High School and completed her undergraduate education at the Trinidad Campus of the University of the West Indies. She then worked as an agricultural officer in Tabago, serving as the first and only woman working in the ministry of agriculture, lands and fisheries on the island. Shakuntala earned her doctorate at the Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University in Denmark, now part of the University of Copenhagen, and went on to become an associate professor. For the next few years, she alternated between teaching in Denmark and working on projects all over the developing world to improve nutrition for women and young children.

In Bangladesh in the late 1980s, Thilsted worked as a nutrition coordinator at the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research.

Shakuntala Thilsted

About 7,000 children came into the Center every year; two thirds were boys, one-third girls. And usually they were so sick and so undernourished that they were brought in at too late a stage, and many of them died. And I was extremely frustrated working at this end, and I wanted to work much further up where I could do something for them. One of the scientists at the ICDDR, who had in fact patented the source sugar solution for diarrhea, said to me, "If you really want to do something for these children, you should work with making sure they eat fish, and that would help with their undernutrition."

So I went back to work in Copenhagen at the University of Copenhagen, and I decided to work with fish and food and nutrition security.

Thilsted was the first to establish that commonly consumed small fish were important sources of essential micronutrients and fatty acids. This groundbreaking research reshaped the scientific understanding of the benefits of fish in diets. With this information, Thilsted set out to increase consumption of small fish, such as Mola, especially for women and their children in the first 1,000 days of life.

Together with researchers at Bangladesh Agricultural University, she led a talented team of Bangladeshi and Danish students and researchers in developing pond polyculture systems, farming small fish together with large fish. The pond polyculture approach increased total productivity by as much as five times. Consumption of fish in the home increased substantially when Thilsted introduced an inexpensive homemade gill net designed for women to easily harvest Mola in small amounts for daily household use. Though Mola accounted for only 15% of production by weight, it contributed half of the vitamin A and vitamin B-12 and a quarter of the calcium and iron needs of a family of four.

Thilsted strove against the current to convince others of the merits of pond polyculture. Her efforts paid off in 2004 when the Bangladesh Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock prohibited the use of pesticides to kill naturally occurring small fish. Thilsted convinced the leadership of a nation to convert to practices that were not only more economic and nutrition-sensitive but reduced environmental pressures, habitat loss and health risks in rural communities. Thilsted extended her innovative approach by creating new, ready-to-use fish-based foods especially targeted for mothers and their young children. Building on popular local recipes, she developed fish chutney and fish powder with four times the nutrient density of fresh fish. Improvements in processing practices also reduced fish waste and loss and increased incomes for entrepreneurs, most of them women who produced these value-added foods. The success of Thilsted's efforts prompted the government of Bangladesh to promote pond polyculture as the foremost food-based intervention in their all-important country investment plan.

Thilsted now serves as the Global Lead for Nutrition and Public Health at CGIAR's WorldFish, headquartered in Malaysia. Her work guides WorldFish. Other research institutions, major funders, government agencies, and public and private organizations work together to reshape food systems to deliver on the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals. Young researchers that Thilsted mentored now use her holistic approach to increase the sustainable production and consumption of nutritious fish and fish-based foods in Asia, Africa and the Pacific, including in Cambodia, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Malawi, Sierra Leone and Zambia. As an advisor to heads of state, ministers, high-level panels and international boards,

Thilsted provides direction for research, policies and practices in pursuit of improved food systems that boost biodiversity, enhance environments, reinforce resilient communities, increase incomes, empower women, and provide adequate nutrition for all. Thilsted's trailblazing research on small native fish species in Bangladesh led to the development of nutrition-sensitive approaches to aquatic food systems at all levels, from the farm to food processing to final consumers. It resulted in improved diets for millions of the most vulnerable people in Asia and Africa. For this and for her work expanding food systems from feeding people to nourishing the hundreds of millions reliant on aquatic foods for nutrition security, improved livelihoods, and the thriving next generation, we are proud to honor Dr. Shakuntala Haraksingh Thilsted as the 2021 World Food Prize Laureate.

Announcer

Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the 2021 World Food Prize Laureate, Shakuntala Haraksingh Thilsted.

At this time please welcome World Food Prize Council of Advisors and Board Member Rachel Ruan McLean and her brother John Ruan IV to the dais.

We also welcome two guests of honor, the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack, and the Mexico Secretary of Agriculture, Victor Villalobos.

The World Food Prize sculpture will now be presented to the 2021 Laureate by Rachel Ruan McLean and John Ruan IV.

—Presentation of Sculpture—

Secretary Vilsack, Secretary Villalobos, Mr. Ruan, Mrs. Ruan McLean, we now invite you to return to your seats.

Now we invite our laureate to offer your remarks.

Shakuntala Haraksingh Thilsted

2021 World Food Prize Laureate

Global Lead for Nutrition and Public Health - WorldFish

Governor of Iowa, United States Secretary of Agriculture, president of the World Food Prize, distinguished guests.

In 2015 I attended this ceremony as a guest of the Foundation. I never thought that one day, today, I would be standing on this podium as the 2021 World Food Prize Laureate. I am truly honored to be awarded this Prize, and I am deeply humbled to be placed in such distinguished ranks as past laureates Mashabati Bengali. *Fish and rice make a Bengali* – an age-old proverb – triggered a research idea and set me on a meaningful journey that has shaped my life and my career. Since the announcement of the 2021 World Food Prize in May, I have been thrilled to see this recognition has greatly magnified global attention to aquatic foods as a powerful game-changer to what's healthier and sustainable diets that work for all people and our planet.

Thanks to this award, the world is finally waking up to the unmatched potential of aquatic foods to improve nutrition and public health in low and middle-income countries. The award has enabled to advocate most strongly to the need to shift away from the limiting discourse of feeding a growing global population towards the fact of nourishing billions of people throughout all nations and our planet.

For the past 50 years the global agricultural research agenda, as well as policies in agriculture, food and nutrition security, and even food aid have primarily focused on solutions related to staple crops and livestock. This recognition of my work opens up new opportunities to amplify support and investments for research and innovation in aquatic food systems and thus expand our thinking on solutions that benefit people, nature and the economy.

I will continue to call upon researchers and students, especially young women from low- and middle-income countries to build on my work and take it forward to new heights. Looking ahead to the future, a sustainable food systems transformation will not be possible without due attention and investment given to aquatic foods, alongside crops and livestock.

I thank the very many people who have been on this journey with me, inspired me, mentored me and contributed to my success. I especially thank Dr. Gareth Johnstone, Director General, and my colleagues at WorldFish and CGIAR for their support.

I would not be standing here today without my family and friends. I am especially grateful for the values and principles that my mother and my grandmother instilled in me while I was growing up in Trinidad and Tabago. These values and principles to make the best of one's ability, to strive and to excel and at the same time to help others, have guided my life and my career. For these precious gifts I am ever grateful.

To my husband, Singh, thank you for being there for me always, since I was 21 years old.

And finally I wish to convey my heartfelt thanks to Barbara Stinson, to the president of the World Food Prize Foundation, the Council of Advisors, the Selection Committee, the Ruan family, and the Norman Borlaug family for awarding me the 2021 World Food Prize. Thank you.

Barbara Stinson

Another round of applause for our 2021 Laureate. So, Shakuntala, the evening is not over. We have one more special event tonight before we close. We have a wonderful tradition at the World Food Prize Foundation and part of the Laureate Award Ceremony. I know you and I have been talking a lot. Our staff has been talking a lot amongst each other and exploring so much since your announcement in May.

What you probably don't know, though, is we've also been quietly exploring and inquiring about your own special traditions in your life. We know that you and your family have a special taste for a certain type of music, island music, and dancing as a family. We have a special tradition honoring the musical taste of our laureate this year during this ceremony.

So tonight, from the Island of Trinidad, Tabago, your birth country, we have a native son. He is a founding member and lead vocalist of a Caribbean soca group formed 2005. This group is known for their unique blend of soulful vocals, calypso-inspired melodies, rock groups, and island beats and all kinds of raga. The band enjoys mainstream popularity in Trinidad Tabago and throughout the Caribbean. And the performer that you're going to hear tonight captivates audiences with electric, high-energy performances. So tonight please welcome KESS.

— KES Band Performance —

Congratulations, Doctor. It's an honor to be here. It's an honor to celebrate this with you and to bring a piece of our culture here with you as you celebrate this. Thank you very much for having me. I hope you'll enjoy the song is called Savannah Grass .

You all can join in, yes. This is how we do it. This is Trinidad Tabago and our culture.

Thank you, thank you so much. Congratulations again.

Barbara Stinson

Oh, thank you so much, KESS, for your time, your talent. It truly made it a special evening for all of us. Let's have another round of applause for KES.

And to everyone here tonight and everyone watching, thank you so much for being with us. Good night.

Ladies and gentlemen, this concludes the 2021 World Food Prize Laureate Award Ceremony. Thank you and good night. We invite you to join the laureate in the rotunda for a gala reception on the main level. We encourage our guests from Iowa and around the world to reunite and to make new connections this evening. Thank you ever so much for joining us, and please enjoy your evening.