THE FUTURE OF FOOD: OPTIMAL OR ORWELLIAN?
HOW PLANT BREEDING DECISIONS MADE TODAY WILL DETERMINE THE FUTURE OF FOOD

Washington, DC—September 16, 2015, for Immediate Release – The role of publicly funded research in plant breeding will be the focus of National C-FAR's research seminar on Monday, September 21, offered at 10 a.m. in 328A Russell Senate Office Building and again at noon in 1300 Longworth House Office Building. The presenter is Dr. William F. (Bill) Tracy, Professor and Chair, Department of Agronomy, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

“Diversity at multiple levels leads to a more sustainable and resilient agricultural system. As acquisitions continue to occur in the seed industry, large geographical areas are abandoned. This abandonment of the margins has negative effects on the future of those farms and communities in those regions,” says Tracy. “The future of our food supply requires genetic diversity but also demands a diversity of decision makers, including a vital role for publicly funded plant breeders.”

“These presentations provide excellent examples of the value of federally funded food and agricultural research, Extension and education in producing the scientific outcomes and outreach needed to meet 21st century challenges and opportunities,” says Chuck Conner, President of the National Coalition for Food and Agricultural Research (National C-FAR).

Highlights: The future of our food supply requires genetic diversity but also demands a diversity of decision makers (i.e. plant breeders). Over the past several decades, the nation has witnessed a narrowing of crop genetic diversity, fueled by intense consolidation within the seed industry and a shift in focus and funding for public breeding programs. Genetic diversity, crop diversity, cropping system diversity, farming system diversity, community diversity, and intellectual diversity are needed for a sustainable and resilient agricultural system. As acquisitions occur in the seed industry, large geographical areas are abandoned. Farmers in these regions are left at a competitive disadvantage, with negative effects on the future of those farms and communities. Numerous public breeders, working in diverse ecosystems with diverse crops, are needed to increase diversity at all levels. Plant breeders must be concerned with adaptation of new cultivars; however, the type and area of adaptation is an economic decision. The paradigm for crop improvement has shifted from selection to engineering. It is not clear whether selection can survive the competition from this new paradigm. Even if plant breeding survives as an idea it is unclear that it will survive as a function of the public sector despite clear public benefits. These benefits including food security based on diversity of decision makers, crops, and cropping systems must be demonstrated to stakeholders if plant breeding is to survive. Plant breeding is one of humanity’s most successful and benign technologies, but its future depends on whether society elects to continue its support.

The seminar is open to the public and the media. ******

The National Coalition for Food and Agricultural Research (National C-FAR) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, consensus-based, and customer-led coalition that brings food, agriculture, nutrition, conservation, and natural resource stakeholders together with the food and agriculture research and Extension community, serving as a forum and a unified voice in support of sustaining and increasing public investment at the national level in food and agricultural research, Extension, and education. National C-FAR’s Hill Seminar Series, now in its tenth year, regularly presents leading-edge researchers working to provide answers to pressing issues confronting the public and Congress. The Hill Seminar Series helps demonstrate the value of public investment in food and agricultural research—investment that returns 45 percent per year on average, and $20 in economic benefit from every $1 investment in food and ag research.

Go to http://www.ncfar.org/Hill_Seminar_Series.asp for more information about the seminar series and past topics. Interviews with National C-FAR President Chuck Conner are available by request. For additional information, go to www.ncfar.org; or contact Tom Van Arsdall, Executive Director, at tom@vanarsdall.com or (703) 509-4746.