Lunch ~ N ~ Learn SEMINAR

NATIONAL C-FAR

THE NATIONAL COALITION FOR FOOD & AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

Program:

THE FUTURE OF FOOD: OPTIMAL OR ORWELLIAN?

How Plant Breeding Decisions Made Today Will Determine the Future of Food

September 21, 2015
PROGRAM

Welcome and Introduction

JULI OBUDZINSKI
MODERATOR

Distinguished Speaker
DR. WILLIAM F. (BILL) TRACY
PROFESSOR AND CHAIR, DEPARTMENT OF AGRONOMY
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Open Forum

Closing
JULI OBUDZINSKI

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. For additional information, go to www.ncfar.org; or contact Tom Van Arsdall, Executive Director, at tom@vanarsdall.com.
ABSTRACT
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.

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHY
William F. (Bill) Tracy, Ph.D., is professor and chair of the Department of Agronomy at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. At UW-Madison, Tracy leads the largest public sector sweet corn breeding program in the world. In 2014, Tracy was named public plant breeder of the year by the National Association of Commercial Plant Breeders. Tracy’s research areas include the genetics, genomics, and biochemistry of endosperm carbohydrate synthesis, the relationship between plant development and pest resistance. Tracy serves the plant breeding community in a number of roles. He has been on the Maize Crop Germplasm Committee for more than 20 years and is currently chair. He is the first chair of the newly created CIMMYT Maize Germplasm Committee. He also chairs the International Sweet Corn Development Association, the corn breeding research executive committee and the NAPB advocacy committee. Tracy has served on numerous USDA regional committees. For 20 years Tracy has been a passionate advocate for reinvigorating public plant breeding, recognizing the serious threats to US agriculture in having highly concentrated decision-making and germplasm ownership.
SEMINAR SERIES DESCRIPTION

National C-FAR’s Seminar Series regularly presents leading-edge researchers to address pressing issues confronting the public and Congress. National C-FAR and the Seminar Series serve as a resource to policymakers and staff.

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