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Ohio State University Soil Professor Gets World Food Prize

By The Associated Press

June 11, 2020

DES MOINES, Iowa — A soil scientist whose research led to improved food production and a better understanding of how atmospheric carbon can be held in the soil to help combat climate change was named this year’s recipient of the World Food Prize on Thursday.

Rattan Lal is a professor of soil science at Ohio State University and founding director of the university’s Carbon Management and Sequestration Center.

World Food Prize Foundation President Barbara Stinson announced Lal as the winner. The ceremony was held online rather than live in Washington because of concerns about the coronavirus pandemic.

“Dr. Lal is a trailblazer in soil science with a prodigious passion for research that improves soil health, enhances agricultural production, improves the nutritional quality of food, restores the environment and mitigates climate change,” Stinson said.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a videotaped message that a growing world population creates a need to improve agriculture productivity to feed more people.

“He’s helping the Earth’s estimated 500 million small farmers be faithful stewards of their land through improved management, less soil degradation, and the recycling of nutrients. The billions of people who depend on these farms stand to benefit greatly from his work,” Pompeo said.

Lal, 76, was born in India and studied soils from his earliest days at Punjab Agricultural University. His pursuit of higher education led him to Ohio State University for a doctorate. He established the Carbon Management and Sequestration Center in 2000.

Lal said he now is focused on nutrition-centered agriculture to help the world’s 850 million undernourished and 2 billion malnourished.

“We must eliminate hunger. We must also make sure that the food consumed is healthy and this is where the concept of healthy soil, plants, animals, people and the environment is a one and indivisible concept,” he said.

The World Food Prize was created by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Norman Borlaug in 1986 to recognize scientists and others who have improved the quality and availability of food. The foundation that awards the \$250,000 prize is based in Des Moines.

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