



Teacher's manuscript Laureate 2019 Simon Groot

The World Food Prize

The World Food Prize is the foremost international award recognizing the achievements of individuals who have advanced human development by improving the quality, quantity or availability of food in the world. The Prize was founded in 1986 by **Dr. Norman E. Borlaug**, recipient of the 1970 Nobel Peace Prize. Since then, the World Food Prize has honored more than 50 outstanding individuals who have made vital contributions throughout the world. The World Food Prize annually hosts the Borlaug Dialogue international symposium and a variety of youth education programs to help further the discussion on cutting-edge global food security issues and inspire the next generation to end hunger.

Grounds for WFP Simon Groot

Simon Groot of the Netherlands received the 2019 World Food Prize for his transformative role in empowering millions of smallholder farmers in more than 60 countries to earn greater incomes through enhanced vegetable production, benefiting hundreds of millions of consumers with greater access to nutritious vegetables for healthy diets.

Life and career of Simon Groot

Simon Groot was born in 1934 in Enkhuizen, a small Dutch town known for its world-class seed companies. Enkhuizen gained this distinction in no small part due to the activities of Groot's own ancestors, who had been in the seed business for five generations.

After graduating from Erasmus University Rotterdam with a degree in business economics and serving two years as an officer in the Royal Dutch Army, Groot entered the family business **Sluis & Groot** in 1958 at his father's urging. One of his first assignments upon starting at Sluis & Groot was a traineeship with Chicago-based Vaughan's Seed Company, where he would learn more about the U.S. seed industry and practice his English.



The revelation that started it all...

In 1965, Groot went on his first business trip to Indonesia to arrange flower seed production for Sluis & Groot. There in the highlands above Jakarta, he discovered a field planted with cabbages of a variety that his own company bred and distributed. Though this variety grew well and uniformly throughout Europe, in Indonesia it was producing fewer heads, many of them misshapen. The variety which had been bred to thrive in a temperate climate had fizzled in the tropics. The thought struck him that here was a huge opportunity to introduce hybrid cabbage to the tropics. This idea would stick with him for sixteen years until he would finally find himself in a position to do something about it and transform the lives of millions of farmers in the process.



East meets West

Simon Groot founded **East-West Seed Company** in 1982 in the Philippines with the idea that a good vegetable seed could change the lives of the poor. Having observed the many challenges facing poverty-stricken smallholder farmers in Southeast Asia, Groot set out to establish the first market-oriented vegetable seeds breeding company with smallholders as the main client base.



After years of dedicated research and development with business partner **Benito Domingo**, Simon Groot introduced the first locally developed commercial vegetable hybrids in tropical Asia. These varieties were fast-growing, high-yielding and resistant to local diseases and stresses. Simon Groot also realized that in order for farmers to maximize the value of these high-quality seeds, they needed training on improved vegetable cultivation.

East-West Seed Company

When Simon Groot started East-West Seed, commercial vegetable breeding was all but unknown in the tropics. Smallholder farmers struggled to grow a good crop with low-quality, poorly adapted seed that they often saved from season to season. Low-quality seed resulted in low yields, which translated into poverty and malnutrition for farmers and their families. Groot sympathized with the farmers' plight and saw a way to break the vicious cycle of poverty and help farmers achieve prosperity through diversification into high value vegetable crops.

It started small, with a five-hectare farm outside Lipa City, Batangas, to begin initial plant breeding activities and train local people as breeders and technicians. Rather than import seeds, Groot enlisted well-trained plant breeders from Wageningen Agricultural University in the Netherlands to jump-start the breeding process and help train locals. This association with Wageningen was among the first of the many public-private partnerships that Groot would cultivate through the years to aid his mission to bring quality seeds to smallholders.



East-West Seed today

East-West Seed serves over 20 million smallholder farmers in more than 60 tropical countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Groot has led the transition of millions of subsistence farmers, many of them women, to horticulture entrepreneurs, thereby greatly enhancing their livelihoods and income. These farmers have invigorated both rural and urban markets for vegetable crops in their communities, making nutritious vegetables more widely available and affordable for millions of families each year.

 WORLD FOOD PRIZE FOUNDATION

East-West Seed today

- Specialized in tropical vegetable varieties
- 20 million smallholder farmers in more than 60 tropical countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America.
- Transition of millions of farmers, many of them women, to horticulture entrepreneurs.
- Nutritious vegetables are more widely available and affordable for millions of families each year.



Knowledge Transfer Program

Working closely with local and international NGOs, Simon Groot created East-West Seed's innovative **Knowledge Transfer program**, a unique feature for a seed company, which trains tens of thousands of farmers each year in good agricultural practices for vegetable production. As a result of better seeds and farming methods, farmers saw a dramatic increase in their profits, doubling or even tripling their incomes, and consumers found greater availability of these nutritious vegetables in their local markets.

 WORLD FOOD PRIZE FOUNDATION

Knowledge Transfer program

- Innovative program
- Tens of thousands of farmers are trained in good agricultural practices for vegetable production.
- Result:
 - better seeds and farming methods
 - Dramatic increase in farmers' profits
 - Greater availability of nutritious vegetables in local markets.

