

# PEOPLE FEED THE WORLD: IT TAKES EACH ONE OF US

AWARD ADDRESS TO THE IFAMA CCA CONFERENCE

in

CAPETOWN SOUTH AFRICA

ON WEDNESDAY JUNE 18, 2014

Dr Thad Simmons, President of IFAMA, Dr Tricia Beal and Mr Simon Hayes CEO of CCA,

All participants in this conference, all protocols observed:

Dear friends, colleagues, young people and everyone, let me start by thanking the organizing committee for great hospitality, and the sponsors for getting me here together with my daughter Lulu.

I normally do not travel with any family member to these events, but this time I said **“look Lulu, you better come and see what I have been doing all these years, at least come and hear what others say about your mother”**.

The SUPERPOWER above who made each one of us is able to see what we do, and also make others see the same, even when we ourselves are not aware of it.

Let me thank the selection committee for the pick; I am sure by the time you get to the final selection, everyone is good, and there is a reason why you picked me. This award is shared by all those who have associated with me, to make me a better person. Some I may know, but most I do not.

I thank all my family including grand children wherever they are for allowing me the time to do what I have been passionate about, and



what I felt I needed to do. So long as I am still alive and energetic, I will continue to do more of the same: advocate for a hunger free world.

There are 2 categories of people that I share this award with. In fact I am receiving it on their behalf. The first consists of all those who get their inboxes invaded by the Journal (AJFAND) announcement. So long as you are in my contact list, you receive the announcement. Surprisingly only a handful of people ask to be unsubscribed. There are many who request to be subscribed, including those who are already in the system. This group also includes the authors, the more than 200 international reviewers we use and those who have given us some financial support. All in all, I have more than 10, 000 contacts in my system alone. There are many other avenues to access the journal and these include:

**University of Toronto, Canada – Bioline International** (Online publishing of AJFAND materials on Bioline website and monitoring the published material in terms of visits, requests and readership. Helps with quality assurance and tracking of usage of various AJFAND products) <http://www.bioline.org.br/nd>

**African Journals Online** (Online publishing of AJFAND materials on AJOL's website) <http://www.ajol.info/index.php/ajfand>

**GALE / Cengage Learning** (Inclusion of AJFAND materials in GALE's publishing programs whose materials are used for teaching and learning purposes) <http://www.gale.com>

**Chemical Abstracts Service (CAS)** (provision of valuable indexing and abstract service; bibliographic citation for journal articles selected for inclusion in CAS products and providing pointers to the original article) <http://www.cas.org>

**International Institute of Refrigeration (IIR)** (- digitizing AJFAND articles selected by IIR for use in Fridoc (bibliographical database) to be accessed by European readers) <http://www.iifiir.org>

**CABI Publishing** (- Publishing of AJFAND materials in CABI full-text online subscription products which includes indexed bibliographic databases, CAB abstracts and/or Global Health and a most valued archiving service, while allowing AJFAND to retain its independence

Published AJFAND full text articles are readily available from the CABI archives on the website) <http://www.cabi.org>

**Cornell University Albert R. Mann Library (TEEAL – The Essential Electronic Agricultural Library)** (replication of electronic text of the AJFAND publications in a database by means of external hard drive. Hard drives are installed in universities and research institutions) <http://www.teeal.org>

**EBSCO Publishing** (Dissemination of AJFAND publications in text, image and other electronic formats that may exist so as to reach a wider audience through EBSCO's databases)

<http://www.ebscohost.com>

Then there are the farmers that I work with, both men and women. One of the biggest shocks in my work was to learn that just because I was one of them did not mean they would automatically accept me. I had to work hard to cultivate a relationship, and build confidence and trust and assure that I meant well.

Now, let me thank all of you for being here, for what you do, and for providing the audience and forum for me to speak to. Many of you have come from far, and quite a number of you are setting foot on this continent for the first time. I refer to it as mother continent, a

continent for all of us. I am sure it makes you feel different and you are welcome to other parts as well, including my village of birth in western Kenya.

I was born in a small village in western Kenya to Christian parents who learnt to read and write through adult education programs in Kenya. Papa was in Kenya's police force and instilled a lot of discipline in me. One thing I quote him on was whenever someone asked him whether he would have liked to have more sons, he would say: "***My daughters are my sons***".

You need to be passionate about something in order to do it well. Have a dream, a vision and that door will be opened for you. After high school in Kenya I travelled on a US/Kenya Government scholarship. My government paid my way to and from the USA.

The American people paid for my first and second degrees. I came back to Kenya with a husband and 3 children and I have always worked in Kenya. My work reaches other parts of Africa, of the world.

Even with your professional training, you need to pick a passion, something that makes you feel good, and about serving humanity. Let me go straight to what my passions are:

I love children, healthy children. Healthy children are beautiful and it does not matter what colour they are. It therefore bothers me to see emaciated African children on TV screens, all because of people's failure to address hunger and malnutrition; we have all failed to rid the continent, and indeed the world at large of this scourge. My parents lost many babies in their toddlerhood due to malaria, and I grew up promising my mother to give her 20 children, to make up for her loss; I grew up promising a hospital to my people and it is only

now I got support to do that; and I attended university in the USA promising to get back home to rid the African continent of hunger and malnutrition. From my mother's loss, I know what it means to lose a child. As I work in the community in Kenya, one of my goals has been how to ensure child survival, and helping mothers to notice signs of danger in their child's wellbeing. Unfortunately, these are issues we in the food and agribusiness arena do not come face to face with. Our business is to feed healthy people and we do not have to worry about those who did not make it.

I am passionate about mothers, about women. Look, I care about men too. But I am well aware of what it means to educate a woman. Once a woman is educated and armed with relevant knowledge, then the whole society is safe. Women are anchors of society. You can be sure all these strong young men playing superb football have a woman encouraging them: it may be a grandmother, mother, wife, sister, girlfriend, or auntie. As I work in the community, my approach to gender issues involves rewarding men who support women. My favourite line is: *"Once mama has a smile on her face, then everyone, and everything in the community is happy. Even dogs, chickens etc are happy"*. In mentoring, I support both males and females.

I love the global stage. Through my work, I am able to bring Africa, Kenya, and my own village to this world stage. That is why what we do is so comparable to the ended football in Brazil, the World Cup. The whole world was in Brazil, even Kenya which only dreams of getting anywhere near it is in Brazil. You hear of European team, African team, Latin American team, Asian team; it all must come together for the World Cup tournament to succeed. The world stage frees us from our cultural and inner-self cocoons. All of a sudden you realize that there is more to the world than yourself. Yet, some of us still have to come back to that village because there is so much to do.

My own community has provided me with many learning opportunities over a period of 3 decades. They thank me all the time and I tell them I am the one who owes them. What I share on the world stage comes largely from this community. They have served as my study community for me all these years.

The African Journal of Food, Agriculture, Nutrition and Development (AJFAND) is my professional legacy. I seized the new communications technology to run a free access, online, and peer reviewed scholarly journal. The focus is Africa. As I researched the issue, I was reminded of the difficulties I had encountered trying to publish my own work. I came across Timbuktu in Mali as one of the oldest Universities in the world; I also got to learn of how so little intellectual contribution African scholars were making to the world, at least in this field. A favourite phrase of mine is: "God did not discriminate when it came to distribution of grey matter". So it started largely as a capacity building initiative. It serves as a sharing forum for African research findings, improving on scholarly writing and for African budding scientists to have access to what is going on elsewhere in the world. We are hosted by major knowledge management websites: Bioline International of the University of Toronto in Canada provides quality assurance oversight as it does for many other countries in the south. A number of African Universities and Africa Union carry the journal in their digital libraries. We are also under review by ISI for Indexing. Many policy makers in Africa make reference to our work. FAO and WHO use our data.

Serving in Parliament gave me new insights, and now I understand policy making much better. I still insist that evidence based policy making is the best way to go. Of course eventually implementation becomes very political as discussions are made on when and how to allocate resources.

One of the most exciting aspects of the IFAMA Forum is the age group that is targeted. It is young people but they also have older professionals who serve as mentors.

The light is shining on Africa right now. But how many of us are aware of that? What opportunities exist right now?

People we admire, we aspire to be like, that serve as our role models include our parents, teachers and supervisors and other individuals we may not even know.

Consistency, Commitment, Persistence, Faith, Hope, Patience, Respect, Discipline are all attributes that can make one truly succeed.

I have observed a lot of energy in this meeting. Light is shining on this continent now; Africa has a lot of friends no doubt! So what stops us from moving forward? Each one of us has a role to play. The Agriculture/food sector (Agribusiness) provides the best job market for young people. However, it has to be transformed, done differently. The youth of Africa will not go through their mothers' drudgery.

Collaboration, partnerships, mentoring and financing of good programs can help us go a long way. So, let us talk less, and DO more. Just examine yourself and make a decision to do something, either by yourself or with others to move this continent forward.

And we adults must learn to pass the baton at the right time.

THANK YOU SOOOOO MUCH. Thank you for the recognition, thank you for the AWARD. It is a humbling experience for me.