
For Making Brazil's Wasteland into Farmland Three Men Win World Food Prize

Contributed by Mario Ritter
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Three men who worked to make the Cerrado area of central Brazil fertile and productive will receive the World Food Prize this year. Brazilians Alysson Paolinelli and Edson Lobato will share the prize with an American, Colin McClung.

The winners were announced last Thursday, June 15, at a ceremony at the State Department in Washington. The World Food Prize Foundation in Des Moines, Iowa, will present the US\$ 250,000 prize in October.

The three men helped open the so-called "closed lands" of the Cerrado. Their work independent of one another took place over a period of many years. The area changed from a dry plain into highly productive farmland.

In the 1950s, McClung studied the soils of what most people considered wastelands. He showed that adding lime, micronutrients and fertilizer would greatly improve the soil. He was able to get lime producers and fertilizer companies as well as maize and soybean processors to invest in research.

Paolinelli served as agriculture minister of Brazil from 1974 to 1979. He helped form the policies that provided low-interest loans and other programs for farmers to develop the land.

Within a period of three years, farmers planted more than three million hectares in the Cerrado. Today, soybeans, corn and cotton are among the crops that are grown on more than 40 million hectares of farmland.

Lobato is a soil expert who worked on soil fertility research for 30 years, starting in the 1970s. His studies increased knowledge about the use of phosphate as a fertilizer in the soils of the Cerrado.

His book Cerrado: Soil Correction and Fertilization remains important to farmers, researchers and students of agricultural science.

The World Food Prize honors the work of people who have added to the world's ability to feed itself. Norman Borlaug established the prize 20 years ago. Borlaug is called the "Father of the Green Revolution." He received the 1970 Nobel Peace Prize for expanding agricultural productivity through science.

Borlaug attended the ceremony last week. He called the opening of the Cerrado to farming "one of the great achievements of agricultural science in the 20th century."

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