

Humanitarian Heidi Kühn wins 2023 World Food Prize for restoring agriculture to de-mined land in former war zones

Founder of non-profit Roots of Peace will receive the \$250,000 prize for her work to replace mines with vines in post-conflict regions over more than 25 years.

WASHINGTON D.C., UNITED STATES, May 11, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A humanitarian and peace activist who has spent more than 25 years restoring agriculture in former conflict zones has been named as the 2023 World Food Prize Laureate

The World Food Prize Foundation will award the honor to Heidi Kühn, 65, for her farmer-focused development model that revitalizes farmland, food security, livelihoods and resilience after devastating conflict. Kühn founded the nonprofit Roots of Peace in 1997 to replace the remnants of war with farmland. The organization also trains farmers in modern agricultural practices, from planting and harvesting to marketing through international exports.

The announcement was made by U.S. Ambassador Terry Branstad, World Food Prize Foundation President, at the National Academy of Sciences in Washington, D.C. The event featured remarks by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Thomas Vilsack and World Food Prize Foundation Chief Operating Officer Mashal Husain.

Kühn's work has supported de-mining partners in Afghanistan, Angola, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Croatia, Israel, Iraq, Palestinian areas, and Vietnam, allowing local farmers safe access to irrigation canals and arable land for cultivation. Most recently, Roots of Peace has partnered with the Rotary Club of Ukraine to begin work in the country, where the UN estimates around [30 percent](#) of the country could be mined as a result of the ongoing conflict.



Heidi Kühn and her son Christian in Quang Tri, Vietnam with MAG (Mines Advisory Group) where they detonated landmines from The Vietnam War.

After initially working with some of the leading vintners from her native California to restore grape production to de-mined land, Kühn and Roots of Peace have since helped establish fruit orchards as well as nut, seed and spice production on former battlefields. In Afghanistan alone, Roots of Peace has helped generate high-value exports of cherries, pomegranates, almonds, saffron and other crops worth an estimated \$491 million since 2010, supporting rural livelihoods and economic recovery.

Ambassador Branstad said: “Heidi Kühn embodies the commitment of Dr. Norman Borlaug, who founded the World Food Prize, to cultivate peace through agriculture. I am honored to announce her as the 2023 Laureate for her work to provide a way forward for more than a million people living in war-torn regions around the world. Roots of Peace provides a model of how to overcome threats and challenges that can impede regions for years after conflict.”

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*Ambassador Terry Branstad,
World Food Prize Foundation
President*

Kühn, a mother of four and cancer survivor, began her work to rebuild agriculture in post-conflict regions in Croatia, where she partnered with Croatian-American wine producer Mike Grgich of Grgich Hills Estate. With Grgich’s support, Kühn helped to facilitate the removal of mines left from the War of Independence (1991-1995) and re-establish vineyards.

Roots of Peace has since developed a pioneering market-led model that carries out initial agricultural assessments to identify viable opportunities for smallholder farmers

before working with partners to clear mines so farmers can make productive use of the land.

Around 60 million people in almost 70 countries and territories continue to live at risk of landmines, according to the United Nations, including rural communities where farming is the main source of livelihood and income.



Heidi Kühn in the fields of Mir Batcha Kot, in the Shomali Plains, Afghanistan, training Roots of Peace women to grow high-value crops for export and trade.

In Quang Tri Province in Vietnam, for instance, where many people depend on farming, much of the land remains contaminated by remnants of war as part of the former Demilitarized Zone. Kühn identified black pepper production as a traditional, high-value crop that could be re-established in the area. By partnering with Mines Advisory Group to clear the land of explosives and helping plant more than one million pepper trees, she enabled farmers to export more than 50 metric tons of high-grade black pepper to new markets in the U.S.

"It is with immense gratitude and a sense of responsibility that I humbly accept the World Food Prize this year on behalf of Roots of Peace and the farming families of war-torn countries across the world," said Kühn, who was visiting minefields in Azerbaijan when the announcement was made.

"This prestigious award underscores the importance of our mission to revitalize agriculture in post-conflict areas, as a means of healing both the land and its people," Kühn said. "As we rejoice in this recognition, we must not forget the millions of families affected by the tragedies of war, who seek hope, stability, and sustenance through the nurturing power of agriculture."

One of Kühn's longest running programs is in Afghanistan, where Roots of Peace has worked for 20 years. Their projects have received multi-million-dollar support from USAID and the UN Development Program (UNDP). Kühn later used her close relationship with Afghan farmers to support efforts to eradicate polio, developing a scheme to offer rural families chickens or beehives as encouragement to receive vaccines.

"With conflicts proliferating in so many parts of the world, nations are increasingly finding it necessary to confront the daunting challenge of rebuilding food systems, livelihoods and communities after conflict. The Selection Committee recognized that Heidi Kühn's work shows the world the vital role agriculture must have in the resilient recovery from conflict and restoration of peace," said Gebisa Ejeta, 2009 World Food Prize Laureate and chair of the World Food Prize Selection Committee.

Kühn credits the late Princess Diana for inspiring her to begin working on mine clearance for agriculture. Prior to founding Roots of Peace, Kühn had a career in journalism, reporting from Juneau, Alaska, for ABC News among others. During her time as a journalist, Kühn covered relations with the Soviet Union, and broke the news of Nobel laureate Andre Sakharov's death in 1989.

"Heidi Kühn's passion for using agriculture to promote peace has helped many farmers and their families live safer, stabler lives," said Paul Schickler, Chair of the Board of Directors of the World Food Prize Foundation. "Her work demonstrates the many roles agriculture can and should play in building a sustainable, resilient world."

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About the World Food Prize Foundation: The World Food Prize Foundation elevates innovations and inspires action to sustainably increase the quality, quantity and availability of food for all. The Foundation supports this through a variety of innovative programs year-round including by: recognizing and rewarding individuals making exceptional achievements in addressing food security; convening global leaders in Des Moines each year to address the latest issues and innovations in food and agriculture; inspiring, recognizing and empowering students around the world by providing educational and professional experiences on pressing food security and agriculture issues; and addressing Iowa's challenges and successes in fighting hunger and poverty.

About the World Food Prize: The World Food Prize was created by Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Dr. Norman Borlaug in 1986. He envisioned an annual prize honoring significant and measurable achievements in improving the quality, quantity and availability of the world's food supply. To date, the World Food Prize has been awarded to 52 individuals from 21 countries and the United Nations.

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