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Robert Fraley Discusses Mitigating Global Challenges in Inaugural Henry C. Gardiner Lecture

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Robert Fraley discusses mitigating global challenges in inaugural Henry C. Gardiner Lecture

In the next 35 years, farmers will have to produce more food than the world has produced in its history, a challenge some are calling the greatest we've ever faced. But however daunting it may seem, Robert Fraley is optimistic.

Fraley, executive vice president and chief technology officer for Monsanto Co. who was part of a team of scientists to first genetically modify plants, spoke at the inaugural Henry C. Gardiner Lecture at Kansas State University in January. Fraley addressed the challenges facing agriculture in the coming decades.

"What excites me is a world in which we are smart about our innovation and take a bold step forward and use science," Fraley told the more than 1,000 people attending at McCain Auditorium.

Farmers, who account for less than 1 percent of the population, are expected to feed more than 9 billion people by 2050 while facing limited resources and changing

climate conditions. Despite the challenges, Fraley pointed out that the agricultural industry has already made advances in increasing production because of two major breakthrough areas: biology and information technology. It is advances in biology that help scientists breed crops. And increased accessibility of technology — especially for smallholder farmers — is improving the efficiency of agriculture, he said.

However, Fraley doesn't leave genetically modified organisms, or GMOs, out of the equation. Fraley said these organisms, designed to withstand factors like climate and pests, have been consumed for 20 years and that every major scientific body and regulatory agency in the world has concluded GMO products are safe.

The lecture series was established in honor of Henry C. Gardiner, a Kansas State University graduate who was a visionary leader in the U.S. cattle industry. The purpose of the lecture series is to bring leaders in global food systems from throughout the world to the university to present their views and provide a forum for open discussion.

"As the first lecture in the series, it was a spectacular success," said John Floros, dean of the College of Agriculture and director of K-State Research and Extension. "I hope to follow up next year with another speaker as compelling."

By Lindsey Elliott, Communications and Marketing

