Pursuing a Unifying Message: Overview

The Charles Valentine Riley Memorial Foundation (RMF) has been leading a collaborative effort to pursue a unifying message in support of elevating food, agricultural and natural resources research as a national priority. This effort has been a launching pad — not to craft the message, but to inspire diverse stakeholders to come together, understand how important this goal is for society and realize the benefits of a shared approach and a compelling, common message to make this research the priority it must be for our common future. The ultimate goal is to develop a unifying message that will have broad support.

2013. A discussion at the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Riley Lecture Leadership Breakfast brought up concerns about the nation’s future position internationally due to declining research investment and declining productivity. A key point: Federal priority for agricultural research would not change unless the agricultural community could unite with a common message and goal. RMF released a briefing paper on international investments in agricultural research and productivity data from USDA-ERS. A Science editorial written by Alan Leshner, CEO of AAAS, stated: “Agriculture R&D provides a dramatic example of how neglect can undermine a scientific domain.” RMF organized a focus group of 17 participants, hosted by AAAS, to discuss advancing food, agricultural and natural resources research through a common message. A partnership was formed to explore pursuing a unifying message.

2014. A unifying message was part of the panel discussion at the 2014 Riley Memorial Lecture at AAAS and the keynote address by Duane Nellis, president of Texas Tech University, at the RMF/AAAS Riley Leadership Breakfast. In December, the RMF report, Pursuing a Unifying Message: Elevating Food, Agricultural and Natural Resources Research as a National Priority, was released at the National Press Club. The report concluded that the nation’s leadership and competiveness on a global scale are at stake. Awareness is growing that U.S. agriculture is unprepared to meet looming challenges facing the nation and world, and increased federal funding will be required to meet those challenges.

2015. RMF held two stakeholder roundtable events on the unifying message, both hosted by AAAS. The first was with 23 leaders of universities and university associations, followed by release of a summary report. The second stakeholder event was with leaders from 23 scientific societies and associations, followed by publication of a summary report. The 2015 Riley Memorial Lecture was presented by Steven Leath, president of Iowa State University, on the economic importance of pursuing a unifying message. Randy Woodson, chancellor of North Carolina State University, gave the keynote address at the RMF/AAAS Riley Leadership Breakfast.
2016. RMF held four stakeholder roundtable events on the unifying message, all hosted by AAAS: with 22 food, nutrition and health research leaders; with 24 leaders of national agricultural commodity organizations (report forthcoming); with 22 leaders of natural resources leaders (report forthcoming); and with 20 leaders of federal agencies conducting food, agricultural and natural resources-related research. At the 2016 AAAS Riley Memorial Lecture, North Carolina State University Chancellor Randy Woodson highlighted unifying message and global food challenges.

2017. World Food Prize laureate Robert Fraley presented the 2017 AAAS Riley Memorial Lecture. The RMF/AAAS Riley Leadership Breakfast featured U.S. Rep. Jodey Arrington, (R-19th, TX) and U.S. Rep. Lisa Blaunt Rochester, (D-1st, DE). Representatives of RMF participated in SoAR’s Farm Bill Research Title discussions, which resulted in development of a series of recommendations to be presented to Congress. A series of special reports is under development to emphasize segments of the public agricultural research and education system that RMF believes have not received sufficient attention and focus. Plans are underway to integrate what is available from the unifying message effort and other related efforts to address the need for collaboration and innovation needed to keep the U.S competitive in world markets and to meet the world’s food security and environmental challenges, with a collective push for increased R&D funding and better communication with society.

About the Charles Valentine Riley Memorial Foundation

The theme of many RMF activities is “to promote a broader and more complete understanding of agriculture as the most basic human endeavor and to enhance agriculture through increased scientific knowledge.” Find out more: rileymemorial.org