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Agricultural superman receives SFU honorary degree

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Many politicians, policy makers and scientists worldwide view Cary Fowler as an agricultural Superman, regardless of whether he can leap or fly over tall buildings and expansive farm fields. The 1971 BA Honours graduate of Simon Fraser University's sociology department is known as the world's seed banker. He is the executive director of the Global Crop Diversity Trust.

On Thursday, October 9 at 2:30 p.m., SFU will confer an Honorary Degree of Laws on Fowler, a former professor and director of research in the department for international environment and development studies at the Norwegian University of Life.

The Global Crop Diversity Trust is an independent international organization in Rome, Italy that aims to ensure the conservation and availability of crop diversity for food security worldwide. Fowler's work in this field began in the mid-1970s. In the 1990s he oversaw the United Nations' first global assessment of the state of crop diversity and drafted a global plan of action for its conservation. The plan was adopted by 150 countries.

Fowler's efforts led to the recent establishment of the world's first global seed bank in Svalbard, Norway, which opened in February 2008. Fowler's vision and leadership will help protect more than a million unique varieties of food plants, the biological foundation of agriculture.

Fowler is devoted to helping agriculture adjust to climate change and adapt to water and energy constraints. The native of Memphis, Tennessee and three-time survivor of cancer says his brushes with death inspired him to want to contribute to society. Saving seeds is his mission.

Fowler has written several books and articles about plant genetic resources, agriculture and law. He was a 2007 recipient of the Right Livelihood Award, an international prize that recognizes outstanding vision and leadership in finding practical solutions to pressing global challenges.

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