

An intergenerational plan for the planet, from soil to sea

Turner Foundation leaders and mother-daughter duo Laura Turner Seydel and Vasser Seydel explore today's environmental solutions

By Marshall Terrill , ASU News
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Story highlights

ASU's first Wrigley Conversation brought environmental leaders Laura Turner Seydel and Vasser Seydel to Tempe for an intergenerational conversation on environmental solutions.

Laura Turner Seydel spoke about her father, Ted Turner, who launched CNN, created the U.N. Foundation after pledging \$1 billion to support United Nations causes.

"[Groundswell](#)," a new Amazon Prime documentary on the environment that the Seydels helped produce, focuses on regenerative agriculture and is tied to an impact campaign aimed at moving more farmland into regenerative practices.

Laura Turner Seydel used to think cows were the problem.

Growing up in a family devoted to restoring bison and protecting wildlands, she had seen the damage overgrazing could do. Then a film by ASU Professor of Practice [Peter Byck](#) about soil health changed the way she thought about agriculture, climate and one of the most overlooked tools for planetary repair.

"It's not the cow, it's the how," Seydel told an audience at Arizona State University during the first Wrigley Conversation, "[The Next Generation Has a Plan for the Planet](#)."

Hosted by the [Julie Ann Wrigley Global Futures Laboratory](#) at ASU's [Walton Center for Planetary Health](#), the Tuesday event brought environmental leaders and mother-daughter duo [Laura Turner Seydel](#) and [Vasser Seydel](#) to Tempe for an intergenerational conversation on regenerative agriculture, ocean protection, climate action and the power of storytelling to move people toward solutions.

The discussion was moderated by [Amanda Ellis](#), director of strategic partnerships and network for the Julie Ann Wrigley Futures Laboratory. [Gary Dirks](#), senior director of the Julie Ann Wrigley Futures Laboratory, opened the program and recognized [Julie Ann Wrigley](#), who was in attendance, for her long-standing support of sustainability at ASU.

Dirks said Wrigley's early investment helped launch ASU's sustainability work and create the foundation for what has become the Global Futures Laboratory. Unlike the long-running Wrigley Lecture series, he noted, the new format was designed as a conversation.

For Laura Turner Seydel, chair of [Turner Foundation Inc.](#) and a longtime environmental advocate, the evening was also a chance to reflect on family legacy. She spoke about her father, Ted Turner, who launched CNN, created the U.N. Foundation after pledging \$1 billion to support United Nations causes, and used media to promote environmental awareness through the animated children's series "Captain Planet and the Planeteers."

"He really thought that the U.N. was a place where the world could come together and solve the biggest issues of our time," she said.

But much of Seydel's message focused less on legacy than on what can be done now. She described how regenerative agriculture changed her thinking about livestock, land management and climate solutions. On Turner family ranches, she said, managed grazing is being used to mimic the way bison once moved across the landscape: grazing intensively, moving on and giving the land time to rest.

The result, she said, is healthier soil, more resilient native plants and landscapes better able to withstand drought and heat.

"Five years later, our land is more drought resistant, flood resistant, heat resistant," Laura Turner Seydel said. "The native plant species are making a comeback."

That message is central to "[Groundswell](#)," a new Amazon Prime documentary on the environment that the Seydels helped produce. Laura Turner Seydel served as an executive producer, while Vasser Seydel was a co-producer. The film focuses on regenerative agriculture and is tied to an impact campaign aimed at moving more farmland into regenerative practices.

A [screening of "Groundswell"](#) was held on Sept. 16. A panel discussion held after was moderated by Ellis and featured the Seydels and Byck, along with Nita Blum-Reddick, clinical assistant professor in The Sidney Poitier New American Film School, and Kathleen Merrigan, executive director of the Swette Center for Sustainable Food Systems.

Vasser Seydel, president of The Oxygen Project and a board member of [Mission Blue](#) and the Turner Foundation, said the campaign is designed to help viewers move from concern to action.

“Not everyone has to be a farmer,” she said. “We just need to go find our farmers in our local communities, have a relationship with them, understand what their challenges are (and find) out ways to support them.”

She said that kind of relationship-building is also central to her broader work with [The Oxygen Project](#), which uses storytelling, education and movement-building to elevate communities on the front lines of environmental change.

“Our role is to uplift the people on the front lines of this work and the people doing this work globally,” Vasser Seydel said.

The conversation also moved from land to sea. Vasser Seydel described her work opposing deep sea mining and supporting Mission Blue’s efforts to protect critical marine ecosystems around the world. Climate action, she said, cannot be separated from ocean protection, Indigenous knowledge or the leadership of communities most affected by environmental harm.

That theme of connection ran throughout the program: between generations, between land and ocean, and between research and action. For ASU students in the audience, the evening’s message was not abstract.

Serene Lu, a [Barrett, The Honors College](#) sophomore studying international relations and business law, said the most inspiring part was “seeing how young people have the opportunity to really speak up on the issues and work with our elders and ancestors.”

Anya Kannan, a fourth-year global studies and business entrepreneurship major, said sustainability must include the people most affected by climate change.

“Sustainability isn’t true sustainability unless we’re including the voices of people that it’s affecting,” she said. “It needs to be an equitable community where we can work together to solve climate solutions.”

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Environmentalism Laura Turner Seydel (center) speaks with Amanda Ellis (left), director at the Julie Ann Wrigley Futures Laboratory, and her daughter Vasser Seydel (right) at ASU's first Wrigley Conversation on Tuesday, Sept. 15, at the Walton Center for Planetary Health on the Tempe campus. The panel discussion covered environmental solutions taking root now — from regenerative agriculture and ocean protection to climate action — and what it will take to turn momentum into meaningful change. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News

Text image(s)



Philanthropist Julie Ann Wrigley poses a question to panelists at ASU's first Wrigley Conversation on Tuesday, Sept. 15, at the Walton Center for Planetary Health on the Tempe campus. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News



Eleven ASU students read the Parliamentarians' Global Guide to Climate Change and Climate Solutions at the Sept. 15 Wrigley Conversation, which covered environmental solutions taking root now — from regenerative agriculture and ocean protection to climate action — and what it will take to turn momentum into meaningful change. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News



Third-generation conservationist and environmentalist Vasser Seydel speaks at ASU's first Wrigley Conversation Sept. 15. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News