

Penn State collaborates to improve ag education in developing world

Monday, December 10, 2012

UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. -- Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences is part of a \$6.2 million grant from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) aimed at improving food security in the developing world.

Virginia Tech will lead the project, which also includes Tuskegee University and the University of Florida. The goal is to strengthen the capacity of institutions responsible for educating the next generation of agricultural professionals.

Called innovATE -- Innovation in Agricultural Training and Education -- the project is part of the federal government's Feed the Future initiative to tackle global food insecurity. Feed the Future is a presidential initiative that draws upon the resources and expertise of U.S. government agencies, universities, the private sector and nongovernmental community organizations to assist countries in sustainably growing enough food to feed their people.

"In many developing countries, a lack of knowledge and technical expertise is a major obstacle to growing a skilled workforce that can feed the population," said Thomas Gill, assistant director of international programs in the College of Agricultural Sciences, who will coordinate Penn State's role in the project.

"Improved education and training will be essential to these countries' ability to meet the expected challenges they'll face over the next several decades," he said.

Teams from the partnering universities will work together to address critical issues related to agricultural education in the 21st century, including climate change, drought, resource scarcity and malnutrition. Because women are major food producers and marketers in many regions of the world, the program will incorporate gender equity considerations and concepts.

The four U.S. universities will work throughout the developing world with educational institutions -- such as universities, technical schools and

Penn State collaborates to improve ag education in developing world

primary/secondary schools -- to enhance agricultural curricula, teaching methods, finance and administration.

"Penn State will take the lead on modernizing agricultural education and training systems in Asia," Gill said. "To accomplish this, we bring to the table significant expertise in Asia through USAID-funded Collaborative Research Support Programs and other activities over the past 20 years."

The innovATE consortium will identify key areas for improvement and growth in developing countries' agricultural sectors. "We'll address shortfalls in these areas by combining the college's strengths in several scientific disciplines with our expertise in enhancing agricultural education in developing countries," Gill explained.

He noted that the program could receive up to \$66 million in additional funds through associated awards by USAID missions and bureaus around the world.

Other College of Agricultural Sciences faculty and staff involved in the project -- chosen for their mix of agricultural education expertise and Asia experience -- include Rick Bates, associate professor of ornamental horticulture; Melanie Foster, program coordinator in the Office of International Programs; Rama Radhakrishna, professor of agricultural and extension education; and Ed Rajotte, professor of entomology.

Contact
Chuck Gill
Email: cdg5@psu.edu