MSU to Lead Global Center for Food Systems Innovation

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Michigan State University will use a grant from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to improve agricultural production and reduce poverty in areas of the world suffering from rapid urbanization, population growth and skills gaps.

The focus of MSU's new Global Center for Food Systems Innovation (GCFSI) will be finding solutions to the problems that affect global food production. The center, which will receive up to $25 million throughout five years, is part of USAID's Higher Education Solutions Network (HESN)—a partnership with seven American and foreign universities designed to address global development challenges.

"If we 'bend the trend' toward equitable and sustainable development and build the body of knowledge on how to harness these trends, we can have the largest impact on the productivity of global food systems," said Ajit Srivastava, chairperson of MSU's Department of Biosystems and Agricultural Engineering and co-director of GCFSI.

Reitumetse Mabokela, professor in MSU's Department of Educational Administration, is also co-director.

GCFSI will engage a team of specialists from multiple disciplines around the world. Participating institutions include MSU; Sokoine University of Agriculture, Tanzania; Wageningen University and Research Centre, The Netherlands; and The Energy and Resources Institute, India. It will be housed within MSU's International Studies and Programs.

Undergraduate and graduate students will form the Translational Scholars Corps, and as future leaders will be key to the center's success, Srivastava said.

GCFSI will work with food and agricultural sciences, engineering and education experts to discover, test and implement new solutions for food systems in Central America, East Africa and Southeast Asia, he said. In addition, the center will increase the involvement of women in global food security.

Solutions will be disseminated to stakeholders, such as USAID, agro-industry businesses, farmers, traders and other food system workers throughout the globe.

"By collaborating with top universities around the world, we hope to tap today's brightest minds and focus ingenuity on global development challenges," said USAID administrator Rajiv Shah. "With the right ideas, we can reduce extreme poverty by more than 60 percent in just one generation."

Each of the seven universities will establish Development Labs that will work with USAID's field mission experts and Washington, D.C., staff to apply science and technology to address problems in areas such as global health, food security and chronic conflict, he said.

"We have great experience drawing upon the multidisciplinary talents and bilateral connections within our own global network to address some of the world's most pressing and complex problems," said Jeffrey Riedinger, dean of International Studies and Programs at MSU. "As part of the Higher Education Solution Network, GCFSI will dramatically increase our potential."

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