Feed the Future Legume Innovation Lab Grain Legume Research Conference, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, 2017

The **Feed the Future Legume Innovation Lab Grain Legume Research Conference,** held in partnership with the Institut de l'Environnement et des Recherches Agricoles (INERA) – Burkina Faso, an institute of the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique et Technologique (CNRST), in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, from 13 to 18 August 2017, was a wonderful success, with more than 75 oral presentations and nearly 60 poster presentation made over the five-day gathering of 140-plus attendees from more than 15 different countries.

Andrew Young, U.S. Ambassador to Burkina Faso, listens to conference attendees' questions and comments following his speech on Friday, 18 August.

Dignitaries, including Jacob Ouedraogo, Burkina Faso's Minister of Agriculture and Water Development; Andrew Young, U.S. Ambassador to Burkina Faso; and David Young, Deputy Chief of Mission, U.S. Embassy in Burkina Faso, along with Project PIs, collaborators, and friends of the Feed the Future Legume Innovation Lab spoke at the conference between Monday, August 14, and Friday, August 19 on the impact of agriculture and grain legume research on the developing world, recognizing the impact of such work in improving food and household income security for smallholder farmers. Burkina Faso Minister Jacob Ouedraogo addressed the capacity-filled conference room on the positive impact of improved cowpea varieties and pest management on Burkina Faso's farmers and the nation's hope for ongoing improvements in crop yields for the future.

Conference attendees' visit to some of the researchers' and women's farms gave them an opportunity to see cowpea fields planted with improved varieties connected to LIL research.

With a focus on the achievements gained in grain legume research and capacity strengthening over the past five and ten years of the Feed the Future Legume Innovation Lab (LIL) program, the five-day meeting opened with Irv Widders, director of the Feed the Future Legume Innovation Lab, welcoming conference participants and summarizing LIL's impact over the past decade, including grain legume productivity gains in sub-Saharan Africa and in Central America, improved understanding of value chain development in Africa, nutrition research and education in Malawi and Guatemala, and impact assessment analyses throughout the projects. He was followed by Rob Bertram, chief scientist at the Bureau of Food Security, USAID, who elaborated on Feed the Future's overall impact in the world and the role grain legumes play in food security goals and achievements.

The conference then explored advances along the full spectrum of Feed the Future Legume Innovation Lab work in Sub-Saharan Africa and Central America through both oral and poster presentations by the projects' PIs and collaborators from the Unites States and Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guatemala, Haití, Honduras, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia: human health and nutrition; farmer decision making, policy, economics, and value chains (including seeds); soil fertility and integrated pest management; genetic improvement of grain legumes for abiotic and biotic stresses; seed systems; farmer decision making and production; technology dissemination; impact assessment; and grain legumes in human health and nutrition.

Highlights included panel discussions on institutional capacity strengthening and on scaling up and achieving impact as well as sessions on the challenges in grain legume seed systems, including a look at a relief project in Haiti following Hurricane Matthew that promises long-term impact and strategic partnerships with low literacy farmers and farmers groups in Burkina Faso and Guatemala.

One of the women farmers affiliated with the Association Yiye des Femmes du Sourou, Provinciale du Sourou, the women's bean - producing organization in Burkina Faso, presents crop yield statistics for the Certified Seed the group produced.

On the fourth day of the conference, Thursday, 17 August, conference attendees traveled to the Gourcy locality in Northern Burkina Faso to see farmer production of Foundation and Certified Seed of improved cowpea varieties. Several of these production groups are led by women farmers, providing both a good income for them and quality seed for cowpea farmers at a very reasonable cost, helping ensure the availability of Certified Seed of improved varieties for years to come. Seed systems such as these are being developed and scaled up throughout the developing world to increase the sustainability of agriculture projects for the long term.

Within the next week, the Feed the Future Legume Innovation Lab (www.legumelab.msu.edu) website will feature a link to PDFs of PowerPoint displays related to the oral presentations given at the conference. Please look for them.

Overall, the conference gave researchers the opportunity to share their accomplishments with their fellow scientists as well as the opportunity to consider new research opportunities in grain legume research and applications throughout the world.

USAID has sponsored grain legume research at Michigan State University and its partner U.S. universities for almost forty years, since the Bean/Cowpea Collaboration Research Support Program (CRSP) began in 1980. The Feed the Future Legume Innovation Lab is honored to be part of that legacy and looks forward to a future in which the outputs of these worthy research and institutional strengthening projects are realizing the intended development outcomes of improving the livelihoods of the stakeholders of grain

legume value chains around the world. The past has been fruitful and the future is full of blossoms to be cultivated.