

## Innovative MAB Program Fosters Capacity Strengthening in the Developing World

Five students from Zambia and two from Malawi have completed or are completing master's degrees in agribusiness at Kansas State University (KSU) with financial support through the Feed the Future Legume Innovation Lab (LIL) project, *Enhancing Value-Chain Performance through Improved Understanding of Consumer Behavior and Decision-Making*, under the mentorship of the project's lead PI, Vincent Amanor-Boadu, an agricultural economist.

Students from Malawi and Zambia have traditionally been recruited to KSU's MAB program either by Dr. Amanor-Boadu or one of the project's host country PIs, who engage with young working professionals in Zambia at project-sponsored training events. Attendees who demonstrate particular interest in the business of agriculture are encouraged to consider the program, which is designed perfectly to accommodate the personal situations of African students.



During their one-week campus visits, students work face-to-face with their professors. Here, Ednah Kasanda, from Zambia, learns some of the analytical tools she'll need to be successful in the two-year master's program.

An online design, KSU's MAB program provides the means for students not able to attend a traditional graduate program due to family or career responsibilities to expand their understanding of local and international business agriculture and earn a graduate degree—without interrupting their career or disrupting their personal lives. The off-campus nature of the program works particularly well in Zambia and Malawi, where employers aren't forced to lose valuable members of their workforce while supporting an employee's educational and professional development.



The student on the right, Martin Mwansa, was sponsored by the Feed the Future Legume Innovation Lab.

The two-year, cohort-based program blends two week-long campus visits each year with online education throughout the rest of the program. Trainings and lectures/discussions are recorded, which allows student to access the course material at a time convenient for them. The program begins in January and starts with a one-week on-campus gathering at KSU, allowing students to meet their fellow cohorts and focus on three key skills necessary for successfully completing the rest of their intensive learning program: 1. finance, 2. agriculture policy, and 3. computer skills. Not only do students study intensively during these week-long sessions that meet 12-plus hours per day, but they become closely acquainted with their cohort, with whom they work online.

The 25 students in each program are employed in all stages of the food and agribusiness sector within their own countries; four of these students are usually international. This variation in knowledge and experience creates an excellent environment for students to learn directly about industry challenges and strengths throughout the world.

The big advantage enjoyed by the MAB students from Zambia and Malawi comes when they begin work on their thesis projects. With LIL PI Dr. Amanor-Boadu as their mentor, students are encouraged to focus on a research project involving grain legumes that integrates their professional goals with those of the Feed the Future Legume Innovation Lab project at KSU.

Because of the quality of scholarly engagement the LIL project offers, most students develop a project related to its goals that not only furthers their personal scholarly interests and employment-related goals but also the project's objectives.

One student, for example, studied Zambian bean consumption patterns, mastering survey research techniques and analysis while also advancing LIL's project's objectives. Since completing her degree, this student has worked in corporate agriculture and development as a project research officer. Her overall plans include developing farm credit for farmers so that they can invest in better farming tools.

The Feed the Future Legume Innovation Lab has helped advance agribusiness in Malawi and Zambia by introducing students to grain legume research focused on value chain performance and understanding consumer behavior. The results have not only benefitted individual students and their countries with increased business capacity but also advanced Feed the Future research and development goals. Participating students have also developed an appreciation for agricultural development within their own country—and often return to support development-focused research in their own careers.

A win-win for capacity strengthening and Feed the Future development goals.



MAB students on a farm tour during their first week of the program; Winne Pele, center, who participated in the LIL project as part of her thesis, is from Zambia.