FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New International Agricultural Extension Program Kicks Off at University of Illinois

A new program for worldwide agricultural development kicked off Wednesday, November 30 at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) to the joyful sound of banging drums. AgReach was welcomed by the West African drum performance and introduced by Dr. Alex Winter-Nelson representing the Agriculture and Consumer Economics Department (housed in the College of Agricultural, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences (ACES)). A worldwide smallholder farming initiative, AgReach closes gaps in agrisystems so that smallholder farmers thrive. Dr. Paul McNamara, economist and professor at UIUC, leads the initiative and team of 18 professionals based at UIUC and in some of the poorest countries in the world including Sierra Leone, Malawi and Bangladesh.

Dr. McNamara explained, “We have a unique niche, as Alex pointed out, when development funding went down in the 90s, extension funding suffered, maybe the most, so we are fully committed to working in extension. A lot of the people we run into in the international research system shy away from extension. We’re advocates for extension, extension organizations, frontline workers. We are also eclectic in that we can support ICTs and other extension approaches. We’re not wedded to one extension approach, but we are advocates for the activity of extension and we’re allies to extension organizations.”

With over 20 years of experience in agricultural economics and development, Dr. McNamara founded AgReach to continue building the $22 million development portfolio made up of projects that have improved the quality of farming families’ food, methods, and lives in over 50 countries.
Dr. Kim Kidwell, Dean of the College of ACES, stated, “One thing notable about the AgReach program is the mix of disciplines and the breadth of experience among the team. People are a key ingredient in any well-functioning and impactful extension program, and in a relatively short amount of time, the AgReach team has assembled a world-class group of development professionals and scholars to implement its program of capacity development and action-oriented research.”

AgReach has grown out of several United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Feed the Future projects. Initiated by the Modernizing Agriculture and Extension Services (MEAS) in 2012, AgReach builds from other programs including the Integrating Gender and Nutrition within Agricultural Extension Services (INGENAES) and Malawi Strengthening Agriculture and Nutrition Extension Services Project (SANE), both housed at UIUC. Through collaboration with public and private institutions, governments, and nongovernmental organizations, these projects have transformed extension into more demand-driven, gender-responsive, and nutrition-sensitive systems through building local capacity and applying research-based solutions that work. In addition to its strong background in strengthening extension systems, AgReach is rooted in one of the world’s most prestigious land-grant universities, making them well-positioned as an international thought leader in extension.

You can find out more on their website at https://agreach.illinois.edu. Please contact Amanda Childress at achil01s@illinois.edu for further information.

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