



Office of International Programs *Monthly Newsletter*

February 2012

McNamara Leads Third Student Trip to Sierra Leone



The rice paddies of Sierra Leone served as the setting for a once-in-a-lifetime experience for a group of University of Illinois students who have returned inspired to use their future degrees on an international scale. The 11 students led by Dr. Paul McNamara, ACES professor of agricultural and consumer economics, welcomed the New Year in Sierra Leone before using their knowledge and

education to help improve the livelihoods of the Sierra Leone people, who continue to re-build their country after a civil war that ended in 2001.

McNamara was well assisted in leading the trip by Lisa Sechler, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Sierra Leone in the 1980s, and Festus Amadu, a Master's student, and a native of Sierra Leone.

The group was assigned to conduct a rapid assessment of inland valley rice swamps developed by a USAID-funded project, Promoting Agriculture, Governance, and Environment (PAGE), which is facilitated by World Vision and ACDI/VOCA. PAGE is an ongoing initiative to develop agriculture and natural resource management in Southern and Eastern Sierra Leone.

McNamara's group spent a week interviewing farmers and residents of the south-eastern part of Sierra Leone to learn about the issues they face and their experiences related to the rice swamp developments and organization of farmers' groups. The students developed and presented a 30-page report that summarized their impressions and recommendations. Their recommendations were well received, and students took much pride and ownership in their work to help the farmers and Sierra Leoneans, with whom they had developed personal connections during interviews and assessments.

After assessing the rice paddy project, the group coordinated an International Training Course on Sustainable Agriculture, Environment, and the Community. The 3-day course was co-sponsored by the University of Illinois and Njala University, and was the third of its kind. Mr. David Gandhi, a consultant from Catholic Relief Services, led training on community-based natural resource management, also serving to test a module from the UI-led Modernize Extension and Advisory Systems (MEAS) project funded by USAID, with the goal of strengthening the extension system in developing countries. Professor Prasanta Kalita, ACES professor of agricultural and biological engineering, was a featured speaker.

Prof. McNamara saw the students' eyes open up with ideas and possibilities of how they might use their majors in agriculture or other fields in international arenas.

Caroline Takawira, a student on the trip, says "My experience will be a useful guide in my pursuit for meaningful work in international trade and commodity markets and I interacted with farmers at the grassroots level who want to venture into export markets." This year's trip was McNamara's third; last year's group conducted a rapid review of issues facing small-holder oil palm farmers and ran a workshop on agribusiness and development.

Swanson Building International Collaborations to Address Pet Obesity

An estimated 30-40% of U.S. pets are overweight. Boosted by the recent experience of a sabbatical where he joined the research team at the largest pet food company in the world, Dr. Kelly Swanson is furthering his research to improve pet health, specifically in the areas of obesity and gastrointestinal disease.

For his sabbatical leave during fall 2011, Dr. Kelly Swanson, Associate Professor in Animal Sciences, worked at the Waltham Centre for Pet Nutrition in Leicestershire, England. The Waltham Centre is the global scientific and research headquarters of Mars, Inc., which reported over \$14 billion in world sales in 2010. While at Waltham, Swanson collaborated with Mars, Inc. on several projects. Specifically, they were investigating changes in kitten metabolism after neutering that contribute to obesity.

Although neutering is known to contribute to feline obesity, primary causes of pet obesity, as with humans, are diet and lack of activity. Therefore, one of Swanson's interests is to identify nutrients and ingredients in pet food that may increase satiety or alter metabolism. As many of the top pet food companies, ingredient suppliers, and researchers for the pet food industry are headquartered in Western Europe, Swanson applied for and received travel funds through the College of ACES Office of International Programs (OIP) so he could meet with several potential sponsors and collaborators for future related research projects. Regarding the benefit of the travel funds he received through OIP, Swanson says, "When meeting in person, we were able to move very quickly to specific details of a potential project. It would have taken months to get to the same point through email correspondence. It was also extremely beneficial for me to tour their research facilities so I know what they have and where their weaknesses may be – then I can better communicate how I can best contribute to their goals."

Flint and Yoshida Continue Collaboration to Compare U.S. and EU Farming Practices



Yuki Yoshida traveled to Austria in January 2012

A common assumption is that market prices and weather determine how people farm. However, ACES researchers are studying how cultural values, including history, aesthetics, and attachments to their landscape, also contribute to farmers' decision-making processes as well as to other forms of engagement in landscapes.

Assisted by a grant from the ACES Office of International Programs (OIP), graduate student Yuki Yoshida is playing an integral role in an international collaboration to study the relationships farmers and other actors, in both the U.S. and Europe, have with their environment. Yoshida is studying under Dr. Courtney Flint, Associate Professor for the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences. Along with their European collaborators, they are investigating how human relationships and values affect decisions in landscapes. For example, is the farmer's objective to control nature or care for it? How strong is the farmer's desire to leave land as a legacy? Is someone more likely to volunteer in a local landscape project if they see their role as a steward of nature?

To compare U.S. and European rural cultural landscapes, communities, and policies, Flint is tapping into her years of experience working with southern Illinois farmers. The initial international collaboration focused on cultural ecosystem service values, and decision making was facilitated with seed grant funds from OIP in 2010 that allowed Flint to plan and participate in a meeting to kick-off the project.

Thanks to an additional grant from OIP, Flint and Yoshida recently traveled to Austria for a collaborative meeting where they reaffirmed and developed the project objectives and initial manuscript, which will incorporate Yoshida's thesis. The group also developed the research design and protocol for future case studies in Austria and the U.S. These case studies, which will allow for systematic comparison of the role of human-nature relationships in landscape engagement, decision-making, and well-being are key to this research.

Both Yoshida and Flint stress that these opportunities to build relationships in person are integral to the success of an international collaboration. Flint describes their overall goal as "to encourage interdisciplinary synergies between U.S. and European scholars. We can learn a lot from how they are managing landscapes in Europe. It also helps to challenge some assumptions they have about us here in the US. These colleagues have become great friends and I foresee this as a career-long collaboration."

Flint and Yoshida's international colleagues include Professor Andreas Muhar, Professor Marianne Penker, post-doc Iris Kunze, and others from BOKU University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences in Vienna, Austria, along with Professor Adrienne Gret-Regamey and graduate students from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, Switzerland.

Yoshida, who speaks German, has been leading a literature review that spans across languages. Yoshida is also exploring the option of bringing Japan into this study. Besides OIP, Flint has received funding from the Environmental Change Institute and the EU Center, both at UIUC.

Greetings from Gulu: ACES Graduate Student Studying Organic Cotton in Eastern Africa



The OIP has provided funding for Andrew Clinard's graduate research to study the production of certified organic cotton. Clinard's research is off to an impressive start and is helping ACES become more connected

with people, institutions, and other organizations in Eastern Africa. Visit the OIP website at <http://intlprograms.aces.illinois.edu> to read an update from Andrew.

Chinese Delegation of Soil Experts Visits ACES



On February 10, 2012, a group of soil experts from China visited the College of ACES to discuss soil fertility, good soil management, pros and cons of sulfur, and creating a sulfur deficiency index.

The six-member delegation traveled with Mrs. Jamilah Fagbene, International Trade Specialist at the USDA-FAS (Foreign Agricultural Service) on a Midwest tour.

OIP Organizes International Perspectives Seminar for Illinois Agricultural Leadership Program

Thirty Illinois agricultural professionals visited the College of ACES on February 9-10, 2012, to gain an international perspective on agricultural policies and regulations. The Office of International Programs (OIP) coordinated a program for the group to broaden their awareness of international social, political, and cultural issues, specifically related to China and India, where the group will travel to culminate their leadership program. The professionals are members of the Illinois Agricultural Leadership Program (IALP), a non-profit educational corporation that recognizes the need for strong agricultural leadership and serves to develop knowledgeable and effective spokespersons to become policy and decision makers for the agricultural industry.

OIP assembled a knowledgeable and diverse line-up of speakers to help attendees develop a better understanding of the role and responsibility of the United States within an ever-changing global agribusiness environment as well as the perspectives of China and India. The two-day program was a great success, and the future agricultural leaders left with a greater international understanding that will be beneficial for their careers and for the future of