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[FUNDING]

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March 22, 2007

Gates gives to U crop studies

The \$3.7 million grant will be used to support global poverty research.

By Allison Wickler

The University's Center for International Science and Technology Practice and Policy and the International Food Policy Research Institute are beginning work that they hope will reduce poverty and hunger in developing nations.

The groups' HarvestChoice initiative is taking off with a \$3.7 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, whose Global Development Program funds research to solve poverty and hunger problems.

Ultimately, the initiative should determine how to invest in improving agriculture in poor areas of the world, namely sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia, said co-principal investigator and director of the University's program Philip Pardey.

Pardey said the first step will be to determine where different crops grow in the developing nations, the factors that affect crop yield and the people most affected.

"That sounds like an easy thing to know," he said, "but it actually isn't."

HarvestChoice will then investigate the best technology options to solve these issues, he said.

Pardey said finding universal solutions for crop production problems can be more difficult than problems in other areas, such as health.

"If you develop a new wheat variety for one location in the world," he said, "it is unlikely it will grow in another location."

John Vreyens, director of the University International Programs in Food, Agriculture and Natural Resource Sciences, said ideas about how to provide agricultural aid to other countries, where agriculture is a more widespread industry than in the United states or Europe, are changing.

He said people now want to analyze how to best implement policies to help the greatest number of people, rather

than providing funds just because of political alliances or tradition.

"If you don't do analysis, you don't know where to make the right investments," he said.

Stanley Wood, the project's other principal investigator and senior scientist at IFPRI, said while it's important for struggling areas to work on solving their problems, the University and IFPRI have advantages in new technology to help understand what's happening in African agriculture.

Pardey said one of the most valuable aspects of the data is that they will become public for all organizations to implement.

"Just having the new technologies is one thing," he said. "Getting them into the hands of farmers is another."

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