

Press Release



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UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT SPONSORED INNOVATION LAB TO IMPROVE CHICKPEA PRODUCTION LAUNCHED IN ETHIOPIA

USAID, UC Davis, and EIAR collaborate on international research program to benefit farmers

February 24, 2014. **Addis Ababa, Ethiopia** —The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the University of California Davis (UC Davis) launched the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Climate Resilient Chickpeas housed at the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR). The 5-year, \$4 million genetic research program will create more and stronger varieties of chickpea to increase smallholder farmer productivity.

Chickpeas are the third most widely grown legume crop (after soybean and bean) and of particular significance in developing countries, where it provides a crucial source of income, food security, and nutrition to poor farmers. The crop's ability to "fix" atmospheric nitrogen also contributes to soil fertility.

According to Dr. Asnake Fikre, crop research director at EIAR and project lead in Ethiopia, "Enhancing the value chain of chickpea production and, thereby, improving the livelihoods of small holder farmers in Ethiopia are among the expected outcomes of this project."

The potential gains are particularly large in Ethiopia. As the largest chickpea producer in Africa, more than one million of the country's rural households cultivate chickpea. In recognition of the crop's potential benefits, the Ethiopian Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA) prioritizes chickpea in its current five-year strategy. The strategy aims to double the country's 2010 yield by 2015 with the help of Ethiopian scientists and farmers, global researchers, brought together through the Chickpea Innovation Lab.

Dennis Weller, director of USAID's mission in Ethiopia, emphasized the program's significance. "In funding the new Chickpea Innovation Lab," he said, "we expect that new genetic resources and improved varieties developed by this program will improve Ethiopia's agricultural productivity and help improve livelihoods and wellbeing in Ethiopia's rural highlands where chickpea is cultivated."

Under the project, researchers plan to improve the yield, climate resilience, nutritional value, and nitrogen-fixing properties of chickpea varieties selected in consultation with local farmers. According to Doug Cook, professor at UC Davis and director of the USAID research project,

“Developing chickpea for increased resilience to climate stress and other high value traits will be greatly accelerated if we can expand the range of genetic adaptations available to breeders,” and the project’s strategy to incorporate new variation from wild species aims to do precisely that.

The new Chickpea Innovation Lab is the latest of 23 USAID-funded innovation labs awarded under Feed the Future, the U.S. Government’s global hunger and food security initiative. Led by UC Davis, the new research consortium includes, in addition to the EIAR, the University of Southern California, Florida International University, and Turkey’s Harran University.

About Feed the Future. Feed the Future is the U.S. Government’s global hunger and food security initiative. With a focus on smallholder farmers, particularly women, Feed the Future supports partner countries in developing their agriculture sectors to spur economic growth and trade that increase incomes and reduce hunger, poverty and undernutrition. More information: www.feedthefuture.gov

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