

Howard G. Buffett Foundation, Borlaug Institute collaborate to advance African agriculture, fight hunger

January 17, 2012 By: [AgriLife Today](#)

JOHANNESBURG — The Howard G. Buffett Foundation today announced a partnership with the Norman Borlaug Institute for International Agriculture of the Texas A&M University System to promote African agricultural research, extension, and education.

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The partnership will be based at the Ukulima Farm Research Center in the Limpopo Province of South Africa. It will support science that increases African agricultural production, enhances rural livelihoods and conserves natural resources.

“Our goal was to create a real-world field space at a sufficient scale where scientists and farmers can work together to fight hunger in Africa,” said foundation president Howard G. Buffett. “I have traveled extensively across Africa and have seen the degraded soils, the lack of access to quality inputs, the inefficient market systems, and the underdeveloped agricultural support systems that contribute to keeping 239 million Africans hungry. Ukulima Farm and this collaboration is a direct response to these needs. It is my hope this collaboration will improve agricultural productivity across the African continent, particularly for Africa’s poorest farmers.”

While much effort and money has been spent and pledged by governments, multi-laterals and non-governmental organizations to combat global hunger, traditional development efforts have not yet provided a solution for the nearly 1 billion people in the world who currently live without food security, Buffett said. Traditional approaches often lack the basic understanding of agricultural and environmental sciences required to provide a basis for food security.

Ukulima Farm was created to develop new models to address the diverse needs of agriculture in Africa and meet the food needs of the more than 750 million sub-Saharan Africans who subsist on less than \$1 per day.

“We are excited about Ukulima and the opportunity for researchers to collaborate in Africa, for Africa,” said Dr. Edwin Price, Borlaug Institute director. “These efforts that promote scientific exchange between continents and across borders are essential for achieving the vision of global food security.”

The Howard G. Buffett Foundation created Ukulima Farm as a platform for organizations and researchers to develop technology and practices to advance African agriculture. The foundation noted that the concept is grounded in the principle that technology must be developed and tested in the African context, at scale, and in collaboration with a variety of researchers and scientists to adequately address the many issues facing African agriculture.

Current partners of the Buffett Foundation and the Borlaug Institute at Ukulima include the International Center for Wheat and Maize Improvement, Pennsylvania State University, University of Missouri and Educational Concerns for Hunger Organization. The Buffett Foundation also conducts its own research in collaboration with these partners at Ukulima under the direction of Dr. Tim LaSalle.

“We are excited about our partnership with the Borlaug Institute. We feel that the Borlaug Institute has the research expertise and the international experience required to lead this effort and realize the full potential of Ukulima,” Buffett said.

The Borlaug Institute will oversee a long-term strategy that will focus research activities in cooperation with African scientists from universities and research centers in the region. Dr. James P. Muir, Texas AgriLife Research agronomist, has spent much of his life living and working across southern Africa and will lead



Ukulima Farm will help address the diverse needs of African agriculture, including the needs of more than 750 million sub-Saharan Africans who subsist on less than \$1 day. (Photo courtesy Borlaug Institute)

efforts at Ukulima Farm Research Center as the resident director.

“Africa needs both regional and international scientific exchange to develop appropriate solutions for the African context,” Muir said. “It has made much progress in the past decade in trade and commerce, but more work is needed in agriculture.”

The strategy will broadly address the themes of small-holder agricultural systems, emerging rural enterprise, wildlife and ecosystem conservation, and conservation agriculture technology, including dryland systems, Muir said.

In addition to the research portfolio, Ukulima Farm will promote extension methodology with partners across Africa. These extension activities could take the form of short-term technical training programs and leadership seminars on development topics such as seed technology or water management. They also may include “roving” demonstrations and training programs to validate technology developed at Ukulima, and creating partnerships with other organizations.

Partners said Ukulima will also provide a venue for quality academic programs around international agriculture, African development, or development practice in general for both undergraduate and graduate students from within and outside Africa. This will be done with the goal of training future leaders in international agriculture.

“We are excited by the potential for working with scientists and institutions across Africa,” Price said. “We know that Dr. Borlaug would have been proud of this effort. Dr. Borlaug was a champion for utilizing science in the fight against hunger. It is our goal that Ukulima Farm continues that fight.”

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The new collaboration between the Howard G. Buffett Foundation and Norman Borlaug Institute for International Agriculture will promote African agricultural research, extension and education. (Photo courtesy Borlaug Institute)