



International Grains Program

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International Grain Professionals Train at K-State

USDA Cochran Fellows met with K-State grain science faculty at the International Grains Program to learn about grain storage, standards and inspection.

MANHATTAN, Kan. - Grain industry executives and government officials from India, Nigeria and Jordan recently met with industry experts at K-State and United States Department of Agriculture facilities to learn about some of the latest research in the industry as part of the USDA Cochran Fellowship Program.

Participants from India visited the U.S. from Aug. 14-25. Cochran Fellows from Nigeria, visited from Aug. 29-Sept. 11. The Cochran Fellows from Jordan were hosted in the U.S. from Sept. 26-Oct. 6. All three visits were coordinated by David Frey, international project development coordinator for K-State's Department of Grain Science and Industry, and hosted by the International Grains Program. The Cochran Fellowship Program is a part of the USDA Foreign Agricultural Service.

Cochran Fellowship Program

The Cochran Fellowship Program began in 1984 and brings people from all over the world to the U.S. to train them in different agriculture-related topics, according to the Marielsie Avila, international training specialist, Cochran Fellowship Program for Africa and the Middle East. Cochran fellows are from developing countries with growth potential from all regions of the world, Avila says.

The Cochran Program is operated by the USDA Foreign Agricultural Service. The program was started in 1984 based on the vision of U.S. Senator Thad Cochran of Mississippi. He dreamed of creating better, stronger trade relationships between developing nations and the United States by providing people of these countries with training opportunities. Since 1984, the program has hosted over 13,500 fellows from 121 countries. "We work with mainly with land-grant universities and other local organizations to customize the programs to meet the needs of the fellows so that they can bring best practical knowledge back home with them," she says.

In addition to designing programs to help participants better meet the food and fiber needs of their countries, Frey says, that these programs also strengthen trade between the participants' countries and the U.S. In order to host these three groups, Frey created proposals based on the programs that Cochran was currently seeking to provide.

"Cochran has programs in many countries. The embassies of these countries identify the needs of the country and choose the participants from a field of applicants. Cochran then passes this information onto universities and government organizations interested in hosting these groups. Basically, what the universities and organizations do is create proposals, which offer to host training that meets the specific needs," Frey says.

The three Cochran Fellowship Program groups that IGP hosted focused on different topics. The Indian group's focused on warehousing and storage. The Nigerian group's focus was on grain grading standards and the Jordanian group's focus was on food inspection.

Indian Cochran Fellowship Program

The two Indian participants, Eswara Prasad, deputy general manager/regional manager, of the Central Warehousing Corporation in Jaipur, Rajasthan; and Singh Sher Jagjit, deputy general manager, of the Central

Frey says that a large part of the group's visit was detailed discussion and interaction with the USDA Farm Services Agency Commodity Operations Office in Kansas City, Mo. Here they were able to observe and learn about the practices of the Commodity Office. The participants also met with K-State grain science experts.

"The group was exposed to some of the latest research and some of the practical ways grain is stored at Kansas State University's Department of Grain Science. We had some extensive discussions and a field trip with Dr. Subramanyam Bhadriraju," Frey says.

During their visit, the participants made a field trip to Catalytic Drying Technologies in Independence, Kan., where they learned about maintaining product quality by using infrared drying technologies rather than chemical pesticides and fumigants. They also visited with Kansas Wheat Commission staff, who led them on a tour of a local farm, and a country elevator and warehouse.

Nigerian Cochran Fellowship Program

The four participants from Nigeria met with Kansas Wheat Commission staff and grain science specialists from K-State, Federal Grain Inspection Service, the USDA-ARS Center for Grain and Animal Health Research as well as traveling to Corpus Christi, Texas, to witness U.S. wheat being loaded for shipment to Nigeria. Participants were Yunusa Mohammed, principal standards officer of the Standards Organization of Nigeria; Abdulaziz Mohammed Kolo, deputy director of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture in Nigeria; Anthony Itseumah, director of quality control for the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, National Food Reserve Agency; and John Adetola assistant director of the Federal Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Many of the participants are in charge of setting food quality standards within their countries. In fact participant Mohammed, principal standards officer of the Standards Organization of Nigeria, is re-working the maize (corn) standards for his organization.

"The standard we were working on before had no aspect of grading. Recently, we were ordered by the government to add the grading aspect in the standard. I was asked to review it. This training has allowed me to gain the prerequisite knowledge needed to add these grading requirements," he says.

Mohammed says that, in addition to adding grading to the standards, he will also be providing training to the other staff in the food division of his department so that he can share with them what he learned during the program.

Another participant planning to apply knowledge gained during the program by reviewing current standards is Kolo, deputy director of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture in Nigeria. Kolo's organization buys and manages grain for the government. This grain is used to aid in price stabilization and disaster relief. Kolo says that after the completion of this program, he will be reviewing the standards that the Ministry uses in accepting grain.

"Now that I am here, and I have acquired the knowledge to set up grading standards, we will review the present system and try to adopt the new information acquired to make the system more efficient," he says. According to Itseumah, who also works for the Ministry in the National Food Reserve Agency as the director of quality control, these standards include the levels of moisture, damage and foreign matter that the Ministry can accept when they buy grain.

For Itseumah, being able to participate in grain grading exercises was an important part of the training. "I have really enjoyed the hands-on aspect of it. We were asked to physically try to screen grains by ourselves by dividing the damaged and infested grains," he says.

Like Mohammed, participant Adetola is hoping to establish a training program for his colleagues at the Federal Ministry of Commerce and Industry, where he serves as the assistant director.

Jordanian Cochran Fellowship Program

Mohammad Al-Khraisha, food director of the Jordan Food and Drug Administration, and Abdalmohdi Mahmoud Obeidat, marketing engineer for the Jaber Border Agri. Center of the Ministry of Agriculture, came to IGP as part of a joint committee from the Ministry of Agriculture and the Jordan Food and Drug Administration to explore food safety with leading experts Sept. 26-Oct. 6.

Frey, the program manager, says that this group's focus was not just on grain, but on food safety standards for all products. They met with state food inspectors in Topeka, Kan., and Brooklyn, N.Y. They visited the Federal Grain Inspection Service technical office in Kansas City, Mo., and the USDA Agricultural Research Services' Center for grain and Animal Health in Manhattan, Kan. Participants also met with food safety experts at K-State.

"Kansas State University is becoming a center for food safety, and they met with some of our top people at K-State, including Curtis Kastner, director of the Food Science Institute; Beth Montelone, interm director of the Biosecurity Research Intitute; Douglas Powell, food safety expert; and Lakshmikantha Channaiah, molds and myotoxins specialist in the grain science and industry department," Frey says.

Al-Khraisha, Jordan Food and Drug Administration director, says that he really enjoyed meeting with these food safety experts.

"The best part of the course for me are the highly specialized presenters that I have met, people that I have read about and now have learned information from to serve my job better," he says.

Al-Khraisha also says he and Obeidat now understand, "how certification is done in the U.S. and the partnership between the public, government and the universities, as well as the importance of the relationship between organizations in food safety."

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