



February 28, 2019

Dear Potential University Partners,

I am reaching out to you today to alert you to an upcoming Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) to award a new Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Crop Improvement. On behalf of USAID's Bureau for Food Security (BFS) and the Office of Agriculture Research and Policy (BFS/ARP) within BFS, I encourage you to consider whether this new program on Crop Improvement Research aligns with the management and research capabilities of your institution.

If you are not familiar with the Feed the Future Innovation Labs, I first invite you to learn more about these investments that USAID makes in the agriculture sector to advance Food Security, Agriculture-Led Economic Growth, Nutrition, and Resilience in the countries targeted under the Feed the Future Initiative and the Global Food Security Act. You can read more about our portfolio and overall strategy [here](#).

This new Innovation Lab is part of a broader crop improvement research strategy developed from the results of a study that USAID commissioned to determine where investments in crops could make the greatest impact in poverty and hunger reduction. That study was part of a series of extensive planning consultations with other donors to the CGIAR to focus investments toward a shared global science agenda around crop improvement. As part of our outreach and learning, USAID held a live Q&A session at the January 2017 Plant and Animal Genome conference concerning the global needs around genetic tools in various crops aside from the primary cereals. That session was followed with an on-line [Agrilinks](#) discussion, which generated comments from researchers and development practitioners around the globe. The results of these events guided the development of an overarching framework for our crop improvement investments, with the new Innovation Lab as a component of this framework.

The general framework includes elements of the crop improvement portfolio in which we have previously invested (Breeding Methods & Tool Development, Trait Discovery, and Breeding Pipeline). While we will continue to invest in the same three areas, the new framework provides a more integrated platform for USAID activities that, collectively, support the development and scaling of improved crop varieties as key drivers of productivity, growth, resilience, and nutrition. Together, activities implemented under the framework tie downstream market demand to upstream breeding efforts; link improved crop varieties to the seed systems that take them to scale; and support seed systems to deliver improved varieties that drive yield gains in smallholders' fields and economic and food security gains within local and regional markets. Though no single activity can span the entire pipeline of Research and Development (R&D), seed systems, extension, and farmer adoption across the Feed the Future

target geographies, the new framework supports the alignment and coordination of diverse USAID investments across the Bureau for enhanced food security impact. Across the Bureau's crop research investments, all activities aim to improve key capacities of public and private-sector partners within target countries' innovation, seed, and market systems in order to foster increased self-reliance among the actors needed to sustain crop improvement efforts as key drivers of food security moving forward.

In the context of this broader crop improvement framework, the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Crop Improvement will take as a starting point crop "product profiles"—specific crops and traits demanded by farmers, companies, and other value-chain actors within target geographies—generated through multi-stakeholder consultations under complementary crop improvement activities (for example, other Innovation Labs' breeding programs, public private partnerships around crop improvement, or the CGIAR-led Crops to End Hunger Initiative). Product profiles will guide the prioritization of the Crop Improvement Innovation Lab tool and method development to support partner-country breeding efforts in selected crops: legumes, sorghum, millet, roots, tubers, and bananas.

USAID believes that US researchers play an important role in crop improvement research for agricultural development. We are particularly excited that the Crop Improvement Innovation Lab, as a component of the broader crop improvement framework, strategically leverages the unique strengths and capacities of the U.S. university community. Furthermore, the Crop Improvement Innovation Lab will ensure strong engagement and linkages among U.S. universities, international research institutions, and NARSs in USAID target countries. For additional information regarding this Innovation Lab, please see this Business Forecast [link](#) and monitor www.grants.gov for the release of the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO). Currently, we have a target release date of the NOFO between March 18 and March 29. The NOFO will also have the date and time of a webinar that will be held for potential applicants. The webinar will be held approximately 2 weeks after the release of the NOFO. A transcript will be provided as an amendment to the NOFO and posted on grants.gov along with all written questions and answers to the Agreement Officer. We value the U.S. university research community and look forward to working with you in the future.

Thank you and we hope that we see your institution as an Applicant!

Sincerely,

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