

Global Meeting, Athens 2014

The Legume Innovation Lab's 2014 Global Meeting was a wonderful success, with more than 40 presentations and focused sessions occurring over the five-day gathering of approximately 80 attendees from more than 15 different countries.

More than 80 PIs, collaborators, speakers, and friends of the Legume Innovation Lab arrived in Athens, Greece, between Friday, May 9, and Monday, May 12, to learn about the goals and project plans of the Legume Innovation Lab, a 4.5 year research and capacity building program funded by USAID that extends and evolves the work of the Bean/Cowpea CRSP (2002-2007) and the Dry Grain Pulses Collaborative Research Support Program (Pulse CRSP) award (2007-2012).

Under the theme *Improving Agriculture and Nutrition through Grain Legumes*, the five-day meeting (12-16 May) opened with Cynthia Donovan, deputy director for the Legume Innovation Lab, welcoming conference participants and outlining the Legume Innovation Lab's technical vision. Tracy Powell, representing the Office of Agriculture Research and Policy, Bureau for Food Security, USAID-Washington, provided the context for the technical vision by explaining the *USAID*



Feed the Future Strategy and Investments in Grain Legume Research and Institutional Capacity Building.

Following the meeting's theme, two presentations on the link between agricultural productivity, nutrition, and research and the centrality of grain legume value chains to nutrition goals were delivered by Dr. Patrick Webb, Tufts University, director, Nutrition Innovation Lab, and Dr. Alan de Braux, leader for Research on Nutrition Sensitive Value Chains, CGIAR Agriculture for Nutrition and Health Program, IFPRI, Washington, D.C.

Speaking on *Achieving Concurrent Agricultural Productivity and Nutrition Goals Through Research and Nutrition-Sensitive Value Chains: The Potential of Grain Legumes*, respectively, Drs. Webb and de Braux highlighted the need for agricultural development goals to incorporate the understanding that increased caloric intake in developing countries cannot be an end in itself. Recent research has demonstrated that "producing more food does not ensure improved nutrition" (Herforth [2012] Food Bank) nor have "agricultural interventions . . . always contributed to positive nutritional outcomes" Instead, the quality of those calories must be central to relieving hunger. Earlier food security goals have been found to have increased caloric intake; often, however, increased calories have not improved overall nutrition, with stunting and lack of macro- and micro-nutrients in diets remaining a significant challenge in the developing world. Research cannot only improve agricultural yield but also increase understanding of what crops lead to better nutritional outcomes, particularly for women of child-bearing age, infants, and young children. For example, a grain-based meal of porridge can significantly improve infant and child nutrition when enriched with cowpeas. Such findings illustrate that grain legumes are an excellent crop choice because of their caloric **and** nutritional content, an understanding and advantage achieved through systematic research aimed at ensuring long-term health goals among the world's poor populations. By determining this mode of increased nutrition, researchers are not only able to help

improve the diets of the undernourished, they're able to do so without completely changing a meal's components, which makes the change more palatable to those eating it, resulting in greater adoption of the food change.

The next several days included presentations from each of the Legume Innovation Lab project PIs, outlining the reasons driving the project, the project's objectives, and the research methods. Everyone participating in Legume Innovation Lab research learned about the breadth and depth of the nine projects—from genetic improvements for increased yield and farmer decision making to pest management and improved nutrition for very young children.

In addition to presentations from each of the project PIs, meeting participants met with their teams, participated in breakout sessions on legume-related topics, presented their work for video recording, and elected three PIs to TMAC.

For greater detail on the conference, link to the presentations and photo slideshow. 