Jim Kelly Recognized with an Achievement Award at Global Meeting

James D. Kelly, Ph.D., distinguished professor in the Department of Plant, Soil and Microbial Sciences, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, received the Legume Innovation Lab’s Meritorious Achievement Award on May 15, 2014, at the Legume Innovation Lab’s 2014 Global Meeting, Improving Agriculture and Nutrition through Grain Legumes, in Athens, Greece. Presented by the chair of the Legume Innovation Lab’s Technical Management Advisory Committee, Dr. Julia Kornegay, this award is the highest honor given to Legume Innovation Lab researchers.

Kelly has been breeding new varieties of beans for more than 30 years. His work has emphasized the use of molecular markers to assist in selection for yield, plant architecture, processing quality, drought tolerance, and disease resistance. Kelly’s work on breeding and introducing new varieties of climbing beans to Rwanda, which produced an eight-fold yield increase per acre, was supported by the Dry Grain Pulses Collaborative Research Support Program (Pulse CRSP), and was featured in MSU’s 2013 President’s Report. The Pulse CRSP evolved into the Legume Innovation Lab in 2013.

“Beans are an important part of the agriculture of [Rwanda], particularly for women and their families,” Kelly says. “Productivity and quality need to be improved in the changing environment. This project addresses these needs by developing and testing new bean varieties that farmers want to grow and consume.”

A current Legume Innovation Lab Principal Investigator, Kelly has conducted international research in partnership with scientists and international organizations in Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zambia for more than a decade. He has also led bean breeding projects under the Bean-Cowpea Collaborative Research Support Program (CRSP), 2003–2007, and the Dry Grain Pulses CRSP, 2007–2012. In 2010, he earned a $4 million USDA grant to enhance the economic and nutritional value
of the common bean through the development of breeder-friendly genomic research tools to assist in the selection of desirable agronomic traits.

Kelly’s research reputation and achievements began at the outset of his career and continue to this day. He has published more than 130 refereed journal articles, mentored countless graduate students to degree completion, and has helped develop bean varieties that prosper in both the highlands of Ecuador and the hills of Rwanda. He served as the president of the Bean Improvement Cooperative (BIC) from 1998 – 2009, having received BIC’s Meritorious Service Award in 1997. He is a fellow of the Crop Science Society of America and received an Honorary Membership Award from the Michigan Crop Improvement Association in 2003. He received the Distinguished Faculty Award from Michigan State University in 2007.

Established in 2012, the Legume Innovation Lab’s Meritorious Achievement Award recognizes and honors “laudable contributions to research on grain legumes and the development of technologies and policies that benefit smallholder farmers in developing countries.”