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Preventing Postharvest Food Loss

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Preventing postharvest food loss

Scan with smartphone for video about how
we're meeting global food challenges.



In a partnership with U.S. Agency for International Development, or USAID, Kansas State University will be home to three Feed the Future innovation labs, one of which aims to find ways to reduce food loss and preserve the natural resources used to produce food.

Imagine taking a trip back in time more than 70 years to the beginning of what many call the "Green Revolution." It was a time when the world population doubled, forcing the agricultural industry to grow rapidly with the population to prevent starvation.

John Floros, dean of the College of Agriculture and director of K-State Research and Extension, said since the beginning of the Green Revolution, the world's food and agriculture system grew to produce two-and-a-half times more food, with the same natural resources, to feed 7 billion people.

Despite growth in agricultural production, however, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization,

or FAO, reports that today nearly 870 million of the 7 billion people in the world, or one in eight, suffer from chronic malnourishment. Floros, a renowned food scientist, said preventing food loss is a key component to feeding those hungry in the world today and to prepare to feed a larger population — more than 9 billion projected by 2050 — in the future.

As much as a third to half of the world's harvest is lost every year for many reasons, he said. While much of the food in the U.S. is allowed to go bad and tossed out in homes, grocery stores and restaurants, many developing countries don't have preservation technologies in place, and food loss at the farm level is the major concern.

"Most of that loss takes place because they don't have the technology, transportation means and ability to preserve the material," Floros said. "So they lose it to rodents, microorganisms, moisture and a number of different reasons that technology can resolve."

K-State is in a position to find solutions in this area, as it is receiving an initial five-year, \$8.5 million award from the USAID to establish the federal government's new Feed the Future Innovation Lab for the Reduction of Post-Harvest Loss. The lab is the third Feed the Future Innovation Lab established at K-State, joining the Sorghum and Millet Innovation Lab and the Applied Wheat Genomics Innovation Lab.

In addition to research aimed to keep foods secure from pests and microorganisms, the lab will be examining best storage techniques, improving nutrition in foods and providing farmers with the knowledge and technologies needed to help preserve a safe food supply.

If we were able to minimize that loss, minimize that waste, then we don't have to waste the resources to grow those crops and animals, and everybody wins, Floros said. The consumer wins. The system itself wins. The environment wins. The planet wins.