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## UDP Focus: Prasad's Work All About Feeding the Future

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# Prasad's work all about feeding the future

By Beth Bohn

P.V. Vara Prasad believes research goes beyond finding solutions to problems; it's also about preparing the next generation of scholars and practitioners.

The Kansas State University distinguished professor of agronomy and new fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science enjoys teaching and research equally.

"I believe they are complementary," Prasad said. "Conducting good research requires that you keep up with new science and recent literature. This allows you to teach students with good material and explain the science behind the principles. Interactive teaching also allows students to ask some novel and critical questions, which can help you to design your research and develop hypotheses to find answers and viable solutions."

Research and teaching are the backbone of Prasad's latest challenge as principal investigator and director of the university's Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Collaborative Research on Sustainable Intensification. The lab, funded by a \$50 million grant through the U.S. Agency for International Development's Feed the Future program, seeks ways to increase food production with limited resources and reduced stress on the environment. The lab is fully established and working on projects in its focus countries of Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Tanzania and Cambodia.

"I am proud that we are working with smallholder farmers to improve their livelihoods," Prasad said. "We use the model of collaborate, learn and adapt. Our lab brings together about 100 scientists from 40 different organizations in 10 countries to work together and create an environment and a culture that facilitate innovative research and education. We are building the capacity of the next generation of scholars and practitioners by training, and we are providing knowledge to students, teachers, scientists, farmers and policymakers."

The lab's strong focus on sustainability is key to the future of farming in the countries it serves, Prasad said.

"We want to ensure that we safeguard our environment and natural resources so that the next generation can survive and thrive," Prasad said. "The biggest challenge is how do we translate this knowledge generated from research to practices that will improve productivity from existing land and will minimize impact on environment and on food and nutritional security."

Prasad's research looks at understanding responses of food grain crops to climate change and developing crop, water and soil management strategies for efficiency and improved crop yields.

Since joining K-State in 2005, Prasad has received \$62 million in grant funding to support research, education and extension activities from local, national and international agencies. He has published more than 150 peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters, and his research has been cited more than 5,500 times. He also has mentored and trained more than 100 research scholars and graduate students. 

