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Teach a Man to Farm

John Yohe has been improving international agriculture for more than 30 years.



John Yohe's work with International Sorghum/Millet Collaborative Research Support Program has taken him all around the world investigating farming, famine and food. But his strategy for tackling world hunger originates at Mizzou.

Story by Marcus Wilkins

Photos courtesy of John Yohe

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They aren't staples of the American diet, but for the 1 billion people in Africa, sorghum and millet provide daily nourishment. John

Yohe has spent nearly 30 years making sure those staples stick.

As director of the International Sorghum/Millet Collaborative Research Support Program (INTSORMIL) since 1984, Yohe has overseen its mission to improve food security, enhance farm income and improve economic activity in the major sorghum and pearl millet producing countries in Africa and Central America.

INTSORMIL was a consortia of seven U.S. universities — Kansas State, Ohio State, Purdue, West Texas A&M, Texas A&M and Nebraska, where Yohe retired as associate professor in March 2013 — collaborating to research the crops. The program's accomplishments include developing plants resistant to parasitic weeds, drought, birds, and increasing the crops' nutritional value. INTSORMIL terminated March 31, 2013.

John Yohe

John Yohe has been improving international agriculture for more than 30 years. In March 2013, the Missouri native retired as associate professor at the University of Nebraska.

“The biggest output has been the training of scientists [throughout Africa and Central America,” says Yohe, BS Ag '59, MS '62, PhD '73.

“We've even had food scientists in the program in Johannesburg doing research on brewing beer made with sorghum flour.”

Yohe was born and raised on a 40-acre farm in Cass County, Missouri, where his family raised hogs and cattle. Agriculture was in his blood, but unfortunately in 1982, so was malaria. Doctors in India prescribed

an antibiotic, which temporarily masked the disease.

Weeks later, Yohe was struck ill in Illinois en route to his Columbia home.

“I had what I call a 15-blanket fever — a 105-degree temperature,” says Yohe who went on to recover at Mizzou’s student health center.

Yohe’s work with INTSORMIL has taken him all around the world investigating farming, famine and food. But his strategy for tackling world hunger originates at Mizzou.

“The challenge is getting research out to agents who have resources to travel around and visit farmers. I would love to see the U.S. identify one or two countries where they could establish a land-grant model,” Yohe says. “Teaching, research and extension — all in one organization.”

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