

PRESS RELEASE

STUDENTS STUDY FARMING PRACTICES IN IMPROVED FAMV COURSE SUPPORTED BY AREA

LES CAYES, Haiti, March 14, 2019 — Every year, high-level students at the State University of Haiti's Faculty of Agronomy and Veterinary Medicine (FAMV) leave the classroom to interact directly with farmers as part of an intensive diagnostic field practicum.

The most recent nearly two-week program, which wrapped up with a closing ceremony on March 14, marks the third year of a collaboration between FAMV and Feed the Future Haiti Appui à la Recherche et au Développement Agricole (AREA). An interdisciplinary team from FAMV and AREA partnered to modernize the content of the course, which was launched more than 20 years ago to place the students in professional situations to apply what they learned after four years.



Students give a presentation during the FAMV diagnostic field practicum held in Laborde. *Photo credit: FAMV*

Collaborating with AREA, FAMV changed the structure of the capstone course, incorporated new knowledge and innovations, and AREA researchers made presentations and assisted the faculty in guiding students to master new material. Funded by the U.S. Agency for Development, AREA is managed by the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences to build the capacity of students, faculty and professionals to improve Haiti's agricultural sector.

Eighty-eight students

During this year's practicum, 88 students formed groups and visited fields in the communes of Camp-Perrin and Les Cayes to make observations and interview smallholder farmers about their systems for growing crops, the most important of which are maize, common beans, sorghum, peanuts, cassava and vegetables. They also analyzed farming practices for growing non-food crops such as vetiver grass, the root of which is used to extract essential oils for the perfume industry. Finally, after working late nights to collaborate on their reports, students made presentations on assorted topics: the landscape, history of farming systems in the area, crop and animal production and — finally — an economic analysis.

“The presentations were good and I was impressed by the amount of information they were able to gather in such a short period of time,” said Ludger Jean-Simon, who taught students about farming systems in South Haiti. Jean-Simon is the leader of AREA's maize research team and a faculty member at the American University of the Caribbean in Les Cayes.

For the first time this year, the course included information on how farmers can better manage climate-related risks. Caroline Staub, Ph.D., co-leader of AREA's Climate Smart Solutions program, provided a video lecture and introduced students to a new climatology tool developed by the University of Florida. In collaboration with University of Florida

graduate student and Haitian native Josue St Fort, they trained students to use climate information to calculate when rust is most likely to develop in dry beans, which each year causes significant losses to crops in Haiti.

Other AREA researchers providing lessons included Dr. Wesly Jeune, the lead researcher on the AREA project's soil fertility program, who provided an overview of the region's landscape, and Dr. Absalon Pierre, the AREA project's human and institutional development specialist, who provided a lesson about ethics in research.

FAMV Dean Jocelyn Louissant said the college's partnership with AREA has helped its faculty to continue to learn about and incorporate innovations in teaching.

"AREA's team has shared new technical knowledge with our students and faculty, which has improved this important course," he said.

AREA provided technical and financial support for this and two prior courses: in Jacmel in 2018, and Ennery and Savane Carrée in 2017. AREA team members will continue to collaborate with FAMV to analyze surveys of professors and students to gauge the effectiveness of the new content and learning activities with the goal of making the program even better.

"By identifying the problems faced by farmers and by using modern techniques, these students are better able to meet the needs of Haiti's challenging farming sector," said Lemâne Delva, Ph.D., AREA's research director and a professor at FAMV.



Students work together on a group project to analyze crop production in the region. Photo credit: FAMV

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About the AREA project: The University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences leads a consortium of U.S. universities to support its Feed the Future initiative in Haiti. The consortium's mission is to help Haiti develop and strengthen its system for agricultural innovation, and to increase production, household income and food security. The project is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development as part of Feed the Future, the U.S. Government's global food and security initiative. For more information, visit <https://area.ifas.ufl.edu/>

About Feed the Future: Feed the Future is the U.S. Government's global hunger and food security initiative. With a focus on smallholder farmers, particularly women, Feed the Future supports partner countries in developing their agriculture sectors to spur economic growth and trade that increase incomes and reduce hunger, poverty and undernutrition. For more information, visit www.feedthefuture.org.

Media Contacts: Absalon Pierre, Ph.D., absalonpierre@ufl.edu, and Lemâne Delva, lemanedelva@ufl.edu, 509-2817-4748