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New Farmer-to-Farmer partnership plants seeds of opportunity in Central America.

Agricultural businesses and farming organizations in Central America may soon begin reaping the benefits of U.S.-developed agricultural technology thanks to a new partnership between the John Ogonowski Farmer-to-Farmer (FTF) Program, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Public Intellectual Property Resources for Agriculture (PIPRA).

In April, the College of Business Administration's Knight Ridder Center for Excellence in Management and PIPRA signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that enables the two institutions to work together to identify agricultural technology for potential transfer to program participants in that region.

"PIPRA's objectives are to promote the management of intellectual property related to agriculture and to use agricultural innovation for research, commercial use, economic development, specialty, and humanitarian purposes," said **Carmen Algeciras** (MIB '03, BA '01), director, USAID Farmer-to-Farmer Program, which falls under the umbrella of the Knight Ridder Center and the Eugenio Pino and Family Global Entrepreneurship Center.

As part of its program, PIPRA has built and maintains a database of what adds up to more than 40 percent of all agricultural technologies developed by scientists, universities, and private companies in the United States. The database makes these technologies more easily available to people in developing countries seeking to improve crop development and market distribution.

Algeciras believes the pairing of FTF and PIPRA opens the door to exciting new opportunities for agricultural advancement and growth in Central America.

"Our role focuses on selecting volunteer experts to evaluate the applicability of relevant technologies available through PIPRA," she said. "Should they prove to be feasible for our FTF hosts, we will then collaborate to facilitate the licensing negotiation process between hosts and PIPRA members."

An example: Program takes a fresh look at lettuce.

One of the first joint FTF-PIPRA projects focuses on improving post-harvest management of lettuce grown in Guatemala. **Marita Cantwell**, from the University of California-Davis, is the

volunteer expert who will travel to Guatemala to examine the applicability of post-harvest technologies for lettuce that are readily available through the PIPRA database.

“Upon her return, Cantwell will make recommendations as to which technologies are most appropriate. We’ll then work with PIPRA to begin the licensing negotiation process,” Algeciras said.

Strawberry fields aren’t forever.

A second project concentrates on improving strawberry production in El Salvador, where market demand for the crop exceeds land availability.

“Since working with the FTF Program initially, producers in that country have established contact with Pizza Hut, GLO Jellies, and Paletasla Colmenita, an ice cream company,” Algeciras said. “However, local producers have not been able to satisfy their clients’ demands due to their lack of land.”

Coordinated through FTF and PIPRA, an expert volunteer is helping strawberry producers look at a variety of other factors—such as altitude and soil—to determine the best approach for creating higher-yield strawberry crops.

Program yields from this fruitful collaboration.

According to Algeciras, PIPRA also is providing support to the FTF Program in other ways.

“Through PIPRA, we were able to gain access to Public Interest Intellectual Property Advisors (PIIPA), a Washington, D.C.-based organization that works with pro-bono attorneys,” she said. “This connection, in turn, put us in contact with Steptoe & Johnson LLP, a leading firm for assisting companies in developing and executing strategies to improve market access and minimize risk for international trade. The firm has demonstrated interest in working with FTF on a pro-bono basis, which should help us broaden the scope and effectiveness of our program.”

To learn more about the USAID Farmer-to-Farmer Program, visit <http://entrepreneurship.fiu.edu/usaid/>. For more details, contact Carmen Algeciras, program director, at 305-348-0399 or algecira@fiu.edu.