

GLOBAL—Helping other countries led to student exchange, greater understanding

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UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO'S KEN HART, who serves as UI Extension educator in Lewis County, finds his work as a volunteer farm business advisor in former Soviet Bloc countries has helped improve his skills working with growers back home.

Hart has volunteered three times for the Citizens Network for Foreign Affairs in 2005 in Belarus and in 2007 and 2008 in Moldova.

His experiences in Moldova, a small nation between Romania and Ukraine, have impressed him with its people's friendliness toward Americans, its rich farmland and crumbling infrastructure, and his own good fortune to be an American.

Visits last three weeks or less. His interactions have been short, intense, and eye-opening. The economic crisis that grips the U.S. seems less dire when compared to Moldova. "One worker I talked to hasn't been paid for 5 months, but he's afraid to leave the job because there aren't any others. And there's always a slim hope that he will be paid, someday," Hart said.

Volunteer duties included working with a collective farm in Belarus that had been a dairy during the Soviet era. "Everything was crumbling. The owner of an air-conditioner manufacturer had been assigned to turn the farm around. He blamed most of the problems on the workers," Hart said. Hart helped them consider outside funding. The farm did invest capital raised from grants and is now one of the network's success stories. The U.S. ambassador recently visited to see the progress.

Farm business education. "My primary mission has been agricultural entrepreneur development and farm business education. It's a good feeling to know that my work there contributed to that success," Hart said.

In Moldova he worked with a dried fruit company and presented seminars to small-farm owners on business development and management. The seminars took him throughout the country, which would fit within north central Idaho's five counties.

The Harts are hosting Peter Vasilachi of Moldova, who will graduate from Nezperce High School this spring through the international 4-H Future Leader Exchange or FLEX program. He may enroll in the University of Idaho this fall.

UI students learn as they help El Salvador farmers modernize irrigation systems

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RESEARCHERS from the University of Idaho and Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza (CATIE) with offices in El Salvador and Costa Rica are working with rural farmers in El Salvador to improve irrigation water use efficiency and vegetable production for 10 irrigation systems.

The CATIE - University of Idaho partnership funded by the Millennium Challenge Corp. focuses on improving economic conditions in northern El Salvador. UI Water quality engineers Jan Boll and Erin Brooks and rural sociologist J.D. Wulfhorst are helping farmers share resources more efficiently.

In mid-March a team of University of Idaho undergraduates from the Department of Biological and Agricultural Engineering visited the area to contribute their efforts to the project while expanding their own educational experiences.

Students will help design pipelines for water delivery to replace earthen channels. New stream flow measurement equipment and weather stations will help farmers determine how much irrigation water is available. Moisture sensors will aid efficient irrigation scheduling.

Idaho bean seed deal with Mexico nurtures an expanding market

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A FEDERAL marketing grant awarded to the Idaho Bean Commission and Idaho State Department of Agriculture has grown into a rewarding partnership with the University of Idaho's Foundation Seed Program at Kimberly, Idaho companies, and bean producers in Mexico.

The grant, said Kathy Stewart-Williams, foundation seed manager, helped "promote Idaho certified seed and expand sales into Mexico because we grow fantastic seed here in Idaho." From 2004 to 2008, Global Trade Information Services reported Mexico's dry bean seed imports from Idaho more than doubled from 23 to 52 percent of market share, said Diana Caldwell, Idaho Bean Commission executive director.

The first year of field trials in Mexico's rich agricultural Sinaloa proved the program's potential in 2006. "We learned Idaho seed held up really well in their production conditions," Stewart-Williams said. She presented a popular planting seminar at Mexico's largest agricultural expo in February. "It's always fun to talk to people who are excited about what you're doing. And they're very interested in it," she said.

DID YOU KNOW?

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TOTAL NUMBER OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ATTENDING THE UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO IN SPRING 2009. ABOUT TWO-THIRDS ARE GRADUATE STUDENTS. THEY COME FROM 85 NATIONS.

Source: <http://www.webs.uidaho.edu/ipo/intlstudents/>