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Social media blurb: [@MSU](#) and [@USAID](#) mark #WorldCoffeeDay with \$1.8M grant to boost African Great Lakes' coffee industry.

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MSU lands \$1.8M USAID grant to boost African Great Lakes' coffee industry

EAST LANSING, Mich. – Michigan State University will use an \$1.8 million USAID grant to help the African Great Lakes region maintain its international position in the coffee market.

Rwanda's gourmet coffee accounts for one-third of the nation's coffee industry and has had considerable success in international markets, but low productivity and plant diseases are threatening the country's long-term success. To address these threats, MSU and USAID are rolling out the Feed the Future African Great Lakes Region Coffee Support Program.

The gourmet coffee sector in the Africa Great Lakes region, the main source of cash income for millions of smallholder farmers in Rwanda, Burundi and surrounding areas, is in jeopardy due to increasingly prevalent antestia infestation, a bug that causes coffee bean to taste like potatoes, and declining productivity in the field.

"We will take on these combined threats through an integrated program of applied research, farmer capacity building and policy engagement," said [Dan Clay](#), MSU's director of Global Programs in Sustainable Agri-food Systems. "The solution will require a public-private sector coordinated approach across the entire value chain, including producers, washing stations, dry mills, exporters and the government agencies that support the sector's growth."

The goal is to dramatically reduce the effects of antestia infestation and potato-taste defect, as well as raise farm-level productivity, two changes that will improve smallholder farmer incomes and help to sustain the Africa Great Lakes region's reputation for producing some of the highest-quality coffees in the world, he added.

MSU has been helping build Rwanda's gourmet coffee industry for the last 30 years. Building on that experience, the university will inform coffee sector stakeholders in the African Great Lakes region of the most-effective practices for controlling antestia/PTD. Working together, they'll also establish a policy environment that will provide incentives for producers to invest their labor, land and cash resources in these practices.

A fundamental contradiction is that coffee productivity in the region is among the lowest in the world, yet international buyers consistently rate Rwanda and Burundi coffees among the best in the world. Program leaders will work to create an environment that will increase investments and linking prices to quality.

The team also will increase awareness of the potato-flavor inducing pests by distributing materials publicizing how they affect the entire value chain, from growers to baristas.

Quote from USAID, if needed.

Partners in this endeavor include CEPAR, Starbucks and NAEB in Rwanda, and InterCafé, Webcor and ARFIC in Burundi. (Spellout acronyms)

The inaugural International Coffee Day, a global celebration of the coffee sector's diversity, quality and passion, will be celebrated on Oct. 1. It is an opportunity for coffee lovers to support the 25 million farmers in low-income countries whose livelihoods depend on the crop.

Quote from Dan on launching this program on Coffee Day.

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