



FRONTLINES

AFRICA



Photo by Winrock International

As part of its focus on agricultural growth to strengthen economic development, Mali recently sent a delegation to the United States to learn about food security policies. Pictured: Offerings at a Malian market

From Mali to Michigan: Sharing Lessons on Food Security

By Kevin Hernandez

Mali's top food policy makers returned to their home country in April and quickly carried out plans and ideas learned during a trip to the United States to learn about U.S. food security policies and programs.

A predominantly Muslim democracy, Mali has made

broad-based agricultural growth the backbone of its economic development strategy.

Mali faces three key challenges in agriculture: increasing the technologies and skills available to farmers and others; strengthening the ability of national and local governments

to design and carry out development programs; and developing more effective coordination between various levels of government.

The U.S. government, through its Feed the Future

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initiative, is working all across Africa to help governments such as Mali design and carry out agricultural development that includes work with the private sector and civil society.

USAID and Michigan State University (MSU) work with agricultural organizations in Mali. So the Malian experts spent a week in Michigan to see how the state deals with its own food security problems, especially in light of the current economic crisis. They visited with township, country, and state officials and were especially impressed with the university's extension system, where university professors work directly on problems facing farmers and others in Michigan.

The mutually beneficial nature of the trip was evident

when the delegation shared insights on how social solidarity plays a key role in the Malian approach to food security—followed by an impromptu monetary contribution during a visit to the Mid Michigan Food Bank warehouse.

Terry Link, the director of the Greater Lansing Food Bank, said: “I had the pleasure today of meeting with a delegation from Mali that was visiting MSU on a trip to investigate approaches to tackling food insecurity. I was asked to explain our local food banking system. But I really wanted to spend my time learning from them.”

From Michigan, the group traveled to Washington, D.C., where they met officials from the Departments of State and Agriculture, USAID, the World

Bank, and various research and outreach groups. They also attended a hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on the Feed the Future initiative, which gave them insight into the legislative process that underlies U.S. foreign assistance.

Upon its return to Mali at the end of April, the Malian delegation incorporated insights it gained from the trip to the design of the agricultural priority plan. As a result of the discussions in Washington, Mali was also invited to send high-level representatives to the May 20 Symposium on Global Agriculture and Food Security in Washington, where the United States officially launched the Feed the Future initiative to aid 40 million people in 20 focus countries. ★