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## **Collaborative Program to Revive Food Production in Post-Soviet Central Asia & Caucasus Region Receives Prominent Agricultural Research Award**

*Led by a Team of Global Agricultural Experts, Innovative 10-year Program Is Boosting Harvests and Incomes Across the Region*

MAPUTO, Mozambique (1 December 2008)—A massive and intensive 10-year effort to rejuvenate food production in countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus (CAC) shattered by the breakup of the Soviet Union has received the 2008 Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) King Baudouin Award.

Awarded every two years in recognition of an outstanding contribution to agriculture in developing countries, the 2008 honor singles out the CGIAR Collaborative Research Program for Sustainable Agricultural Production in the CAC. For the last ten years, the program has marshaled the talents of experts from nine CGIAR centers worldwide to implement dozens of new agricultural and environmental technologies that are contributing to boost food production and incomes in CAC region.

“Nearly 40 million rural people in the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus were essentially stranded by the Soviet break-up, which left their economies shrinking, poverty increasing. Food security was a major concern,” said Dr. Christopher Martius, Head of the CAC Program Facilitation Unit based at the Regional Office for CAC of the International Center for Agriculture Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), in Uzbekistan. “The research team assembled to assist the region, which included crop and livestock scientists and experts on water management, food and agriculture policy, has been instrumental in providing these countries with a sturdy bridge to modern agriculture.”

For example, CGIAR scientists mobilized a series of missions to conserve plant diversity in the region and use these indigenous genetic resources to breed new crop varieties. With help from the program, there are now functioning crop gene banks in all eight countries in the CAC that together house some 47,000 viable seed varieties.

This plant material has been instrumental in driving breeding programs that have provided the region with 40 new varieties of higher-yielding, stress resistant crops, like winter wheat, barley, chickpea, groundnut, soybean, lentil, potato, and a range of vegetables. These new varieties can now be found on 357,000 hectares of farmland across Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan in Central Asia, and Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia in the Caucasus.

In addition, scientists with the program developed partnerships with each country’s National Agriculture Research Center. During the Soviet years, these centers had been essentially isolated from the international scientific community and hence unable to explore and provide new, cost-effective farming technologies. CGIAR experts have developed capacity building programs that have reached 7,000 scientists in the region.

And together they have partnered with more than 9,000 farmers to encourage adoption of a variety of innovations.

For example, cotton is a major cash crop in Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, where it can compete with food crops for fertile ground and natural resources. The CGIAR program in these countries has contributed in further developing and disseminating the native practice of planting wheat into standing cotton. The practice has been implemented on 1.3 million hectares.

Additional accomplishments include a more than ten-fold increase in soybean production in Southeastern Kazakhstan, where the area under soybean cultivation has gone from 3,000 to 40,000 hectares. Meanwhile, the use of raised beds for cultivating winter wheat has produced tremendous improvements over traditional methods for farmers in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. Conservation agriculture practices have been developed and are disseminated among farmers. To illustrate, almost 8 million hectares of land are now under conservation agriculture in Kazakhstan alone.

“This program in the CAC shows what can be achieved through a well-coordinated and collaborative international research effort,” said Dr. Martius. “The program derives its main strength from strong partnerships established between the national programs and international agricultural research centers. It provides a powerful model for an intervention driven by agriculture research that can be studied and duplicated in other parts of the world where farming systems are imperiled.”

The CGIAR centers involved in the project were: the Mexico City-based International Wheat and Maize Improvement Center (CIMMYT) the Nairobi-based International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI); the Lima, Peru-based International Potato Center (CIP); the Aleppo, Syria-based International Center for Agriculture Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA); the India-based International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT); the Rome-based Bioversity International; the Washington DC-based International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI); the Sri Lanka-based International Water Management Institute (IWMI); and the Manila-based International Rice Research Institute (IRRI).

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**About the CGIAR:**

The CGIAR, established in 1971, is a strategic partnership of countries, international and regional organizations and private foundations supporting the work of 15 international Centers. In collaboration with national agricultural research systems, civil society and the private sector, the CGIAR fosters sustainable agricultural growth through high-quality science aimed at benefiting the poor through stronger food security, better human nutrition and health, higher incomes and improved management of natural resources. For more information, please visit [www.cgiar.org](http://www.cgiar.org).