Joint funding for ag health and safety projects in developing countries

By Andrea Sargis

The Western Center for Agricultural Health and Safety (WCAHS) is proudly partnering with the UC Davis Blum Center for Developing Economies to help impoverished communities around the world improve the health and safety of agricultural workers. WCAHS and the Blum Center are excited to announce joint funding of six undergraduate and eight graduate students to conduct agricultural health and safety related projects this summer both in the United States and abroad.

Undergraduate projects are centered in Latin America. Trent McGowan and Ariel Chavez will work to improve water quality and catchment in Chirinos, Peru, a small agricultural town that has outgrown its current water supply system.

Alex Thornton-Dunwoody will help build a low-cost pollen dryer for Colombian beekeepers to improve bee pollen storage.

Tracie Dang, Elspeth Fullerton and Greta Soos will travel to Sabana Grande, Nicaragua, a community that depends on dairy cows as its main source of milk and dairy products, but cattle nutrition suffers, due to a lack of crop growth during the dry season. The undergraduates will conduct community silage workshops and help build a silage chopper for the cows.

Graduate student projects range from North America, to Latin America to Asia. Michael Kato will help establish a “One Health” approach in Knights Landing, California.

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Participants described a predominantly agricultural-based community in which many of the residents are migrant, undocumented poor Latino workers with little access to health care. The One Health approach brings veterinarians and physicians together in one building to improve animal and human health through shared knowledge, while also educating the community about zoonotic diseases, animal husbandry, and preventative vaccines.

Lisandra Ochoa and Kayla Carlson will also be taking a One Health approach to community development in Sabana Grande, Nicaragua. Their goal is to assess the health needs of the community and provide education about disease states and preventative care, especially to the local youth, in order to empower the next generation of leaders.

Laura Budd, Abigail Fosdick, Samantha Lawton, and Sarah Tirrell will also travel to Sabana Grande, Nicaragua, to help improve poultry egg and meat production by training families on simple and inexpensive interventions, such as record-keeping, night housing, and disease prevention to boost poultry output.

Lastly, Wendi Jackson and Jake Pry will study the role of pesticides and alcohol consumption in a kidney disease epidemic among the rural poor in Sri Lanka. The epidemic is especially prevalent in farming regions of the north central region of the county.

These hands-on opportunities allow students to gain field experience in establishing change to problems that they are passionate about solving.

As summed up by Blum Center Director Lovell (Tu) Jarvis, “The Blum Center is delighted to collaborate with WCAHS to sponsor truly excellent UC Davis graduate and undergraduate students who apply their knowledge, skills, and energy to improving the lives of others, and simultaneously learn from and enjoy those they meet and work with.”

Andrea Sargis, is a graduating professional writing intern and design major.

Students in Nicaragua making a supplemental nutritional block for cattle.

(Photos courtesy of UC Davis Blum Center).
Christopher Paige, executive director of the California Human Development, Joel Diringer, past coordinator of the Farmworker Stakeholder Advisory Group, and Yissel Barajas, chief human services officer of Reiter Affiliated Companies (largest California strawberry grower) gave their thoughts on how farm worker health can be improved and steps to be taken to do so.

All speakers and panelists agreed that migrant farmworkers have a difficult time attaining healthcare, primarily due to social and economic factors. The policy recommendations outlined in the paper describe the need for expansion of health insurance and access to farmworkers; improved public health infrastructure, especially in agricultural areas; increased numbers of healthcare workers and occupational safety employees, such as nurses, family care physicians and promotores de salud; the establishment of fairness across the agricultural industry in terms of overtime pay, labor codes and minimum wage; improved living conditions (housing, food, water); and finally, promotion of agricultural safety and health education.

It is an advantageous time to make changes to farm worker healthcare as the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) has created a framework to provide health insurance and care for all people living and working in the U.S. Solutions can be made to provide health insurance to all farmworkers and their families, including enhancing workplace-based plans, not in conflict with the ACA.

The paper was supported by the UC Global Health Institute (UCGHI), a UC-wide institution that focuses on furthering the education and awareness of health and safety across the world. With the advancement of education in the field of health and safety in mind, the UCGHI along with the team behind this policy paper hope to see change in the field of accessible healthcare in the state of California for migrant farmworkers.
The book extends across all facets of Mexican life and culture, including the local people, markets, food, festivals, art, religion and politics of each region.

Some of the book’s pictures were prominently exhibited in 2013 at the Consulate of Mexico in Sacramento to serve as a reminder for people walking through the building of their beautiful country, especially to those who had been away for many years. To find out more about the book, visit www.lulu.com.

WCAHS Associate Director Kent Pinkerton recently published an article, “Women and Lung Disease: Gender Differences and Global Health Disparities” in the American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine. A number of pulmonary diseases affect women differently and with a greater degree of severity than men. One such disease is chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), which used to be found primarily in men but now affects men and women almost equally around the globe. COPD is associated with exposure to dust and biomass or vegetative burning, both of which are common in agriculture. The paper focuses on biological and socioeconomic factors that cause health disparities for women, such as lack of health care access and culture.

Alex Castañeda, WCAHS graduate student, and recipient of the John Muir Institute of the Environment’s White Family Fellows Graduate Student Award, presented his work on May 29, 2015, to the funder, Jerry White, at a presentation held at UC Davis. The White Family award supported some of Alex’s graduate studies on how Sacramento derived air pollution enhances the allergic/asthmatic response. Alex found presenting to Mr. Jerry White, the selection committee, and the other fellows of the program a very rewarding experience, as much of the work focused on addressing environmental justice issues in the California’s Central Valley. Mr. White was very encouraging and gave the fellows the confidence that it only takes one positive idea and the will to carry it out to change the world.

WCAHS Director Marc Schenker has just published Magical Mexico: People, Tradition, Color/México Mágico: Gente, Tradición, Color. The bi-lingual book showcases the vibrancy of 15 Mexican states through beautiful photographs and informational commentary.