

# Strengthening Minnesota's GLOBAL NETWORK

Extension engages with scientists, teachers and leaders from around the world



## Extension opportunities bring together citizen-leaders to improve the world.

Left: Glen Haag explains his Minnesota farm operation to Laila Louddi and other Moroccan visitors. Right: Moroccan Rural Leadership program in Meknes, Morocco.

Minnesota is part of an increasingly connected global society, which benefits from exchanges in education, research and development.

For many countries, just like for Minnesota, development depends on strengthening their rural regions. While a country like Morocco differs in many ways from Minnesota, rural leadership works according to many of the same principles.

University of Minnesota Extension leads Cooperative Extension nationally on international development challenges and intercultural skill-building. The Moroccan Rural Leadership program is one of Extension's global initiatives, which are largely funded by federal grants. Farmer-to-Farmer funding from the U.S. Agency

for International Development supported Extension in rejuvenating a longstanding relationship with Morocco's National School of Agriculture in Meknes to develop organizational skills needed by new rural farm cooperatives and associations.

## Mentoring leaders

Rich Miska, senior financial services executive with AgStar Financial Services in Waite Park, went to Morocco in 2010 on an international seminar trip with the Minnesota Agriculture & Rural Leadership (MARL) program. MARL, a partnership of University of Minnesota Extension and Southwest Minnesota State University, helps rural and agricultural leaders like Miska strengthen their networks and build leadership skills. It's a goal that, carried across borders, can improve lives globally and make the world more secure.

Selected as a mentor partly because of his financial skills, Miska shared experiences with a Moroccan honey producer. Extension leadership educators and two other MARL alumni paired with farmers who grow dates, olives and tree fruits. The Moroccan farmers, 10 men and 10 women, were selected for their leadership potential and ability to influence others.

"The biggest handicap our farmers face is the ability to grow when they lack financial aid, or when the funds stop coming," says Laila Louddi. She works in the Meknes Regional Agriculture Office that helps farmers become more successful. "Small farming cooperatives in Morocco lean heavily on aid from the U.S. and elsewhere. If they can learn how to manage better and become independent from this aid, this is success."

Louddi began to see such success as farmers carried out action plans and stayed in touch

# International roots

Extension's global work began with supporting agricultural exports during and after World War I. In the '60s and '70s, a relationship started with Morocco. The "Minnesota Project" educated Moroccans, who then returned to Morocco to create a world-class research and teaching institute.

Many of those college students became leaders, such as Mohammed Sadiki, secretary general in Morocco's Ministry of Agriculture. "That project trained 400 'ambassadors' for Minnesota, who are now living in Morocco," he says. "To this day, they hold Minnesota—and the U.S.—in their hearts."

"Extension is frequently invited by other countries to share the model of connecting communities to University research," says Meredith McQuaid, the University's associate vice president and dean of international programs. "The model appeals to people because it engages people in their own learning with each other."



**Nearly 400 Moroccans earned degrees through the 1970s-era Minnesota Project, and many maintain relationships with Minnesota researchers and businesses today. Pictured:** This 1970s photo shows Ph.D. student Ahmed Zahour (right) and Zahour's adviser, Donald Rasmussen, a U of M world expert in barley.



Liu Minggou, a deputy director in China's Ministry of Agriculture (right) and his colleagues learn about Minnesota beef from Alfredo DiCostanzo, Extension animal scientist.

with their Minnesotan mentors. She noticed more awareness of agricultural technology, confidence among female agricultural leaders, stronger decision-making and better communication among cooperatives.

Miska says the learning went both ways. "Context is everything when it comes to learning, and in Morocco I've applied what I learned through MARL," he says. "I returned better equipped to affect change, embrace diversity and provide leadership across rural Minnesota."

## Bringing the world to Minnesota

In August 2015, Extension welcomed Cochran Fellows from Morocco and Algeria. Part of the USDA's Foreign Agricultural Services, the Cochran Fellows program trains professionals from middle-income countries,

emerging markets and emerging democracies to develop agricultural systems and to strengthen trade.

"If we can help people from another country to do better, that's a good thing," says Glen Haag, a farmer in Winona County who showed the group how his conservation plan helps prevent erosion and runoff. "When you have research behind you, you can usually get someone to try at least one new thing," he told them.

Recently, a group from China came to learn from Extension meat scientists and livestock experts, as well as from beef producers. Liu Minggou, a deputy director in China's Ministry of Agriculture, says, "We learned how well scientists and government can work together in support of industry."

"People in the food and agriculture industry understand how our strengths can help us lead in the world, and they want to make these connections," says John Vreyens, Extension's director of global initiatives. "This is how Extension helps solve the grand challenges of a diverse and changing world."

**For more information about Extension's global initiatives, visit <http://www.extension.umn.edu/about/global>**