

Fighting Malnutrition with Science in Guatemala

(Guatemala City, December 5) Researchers from the Instituto de Agricultura, Recursos Naturales y Ambiente at the Universidad Rafael Landívar (URL-IARNA) together with counterparts at McGill University in Canada and at the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) have received \$450,000 for a three-year, Canadian-funded project to address food and nutrition insecurity in Guatemala. Co-led by URL-IARNA and McGill University in collaboration with IICA, the project *Food Insecurity and Under-Nutrition in Guatemala* will examine the effectiveness of strategies and identify initiatives that could be replicated in vulnerable regions to improve rural livelihoods.

“This project focuses on one of URL’s prioritized themes, namely food security and under-nutrition”, says Juventino Gálvez, director of IARNA. “Guatemala has received considerable financing and technical assistance in rural development and food security in recent years, but few changes have happened in the country”, he says. “The role of academia in Guatemala should be to highlight what policies should be promoted in different territories in Guatemala”.

Roughly one-quarter of Guatemalans do not have enough to eat. Children under five fare the worst: almost half — 49% — are chronically malnourished, the highest rate in Latin America. The Guatemalan government, international donors, NGOs, and the private sector have funded hundreds of initiatives — mainly focused on food distribution and income transfers — but food security and poverty indicators have not improved in 20 years. Largely neglected has been agriculture’s critical role in making food more secure and nutritious, as well as the importance of science in informing effective policy choices. The food security project announced today seeks to address this.

“This project responds to the complex phenomenon of food security using a rigorous, multidisciplinary, and scientific approach,” says Hugo Melgar-Quiñonez of the McGill Institute for Global Food Security. “We hope to identify innovative and effective solutions to inform the current debate in food security,” he says, adding, “this work also complements McGill’s broader research work on issues related to food security, such as food production, processing and marketing, food consumption, and malnutrition.”

The project will study four agriculturally and culturally diverse regions in Guatemala. Using mapping and modelling tools, researchers will assess past food security policies and practices to identify those that have worked best. Working with IICA, the researchers will develop practical recommendations to help improve food security decisions by the Guatemalan government and other national and international development actors

“IICA is pleased to partner with the URL and McGill University on this significant initiative” says Keith Andrews, IICA representative in Guatemala. “As the coordinator for the advocacy component of the project, IICA will draw on its 34 country offices and knowledge networks across the hemisphere to ensure that national and international actors take the results of the research into consideration in future action.”

The research project is funded by Canada’s International Development Research Centre (IDRC). A key part of Canada’s foreign aid program, IDRC funds research in developing countries to promote growth and development.

“Chronic malnutrition in Guatemala has denied too many people the chance to lead productive lives and reach their full potential,” says IDRC’s Director for the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, Federico Burone. “Because of the rigorous research approach adopted in this project and the evidence that will be generated, we expect results to be applicable beyond the four test areas to the rest of Guatemala and to other countries in the region working to make food more secure and nutritious.”

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For more information contact:

[The Institute of Agriculture, Natural Resources and the Environment](#) (IARNA) is one of ten research institutes at Universidad Rafael Landívar (URL). IARNA supports technological improvement, competitiveness and quality of agricultural production, as well as promotes an effective decision-making process on topics related to agriculture, natural resources and the environmental. These objectives are promoted by implementing strategic research actions, training and dissemination of information that strength a developmental model that balances the use of natural resources, conservation and rural development.

[McGill University](#), founded in Montreal, Que., in 1821, is Canada’s leading post-secondary institution. It has two campuses, 11 faculties, 11 professional schools, 300 programs of study and more than 37,000 students, including 8,300 graduate students. McGill attracts students from over 150 countries around the world, with more than 7,200 international students making up 20 per cent of the student body. Almost half of McGill students claim a first language other than English, including more than 6,200 francophones.

[The Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture](#) (IICA) is the specialized agency of the Inter-American System for the promotion of agriculture and rural well-being, and our efforts are fully focused on making **agriculture competitive and sustainable in the Americas**. IICA has an innovative vision of the challenges facing agriculture, which range from the effects of climate change on agricultural production to the urgent need to feed a growing world population; while at the same time creating opportunities and jobs for the men and women of the rural areas of our member countries.

[IDRC](#)

A key part of Canada’s aid program, the International Development Research Centre supports research in developing countries to promote growth and development. The result is innovative, lasting local solutions that aim to bring change to those who need it most.