

The Herald Journal

‘A brighter future’

Nigerian trio visits USU for agricultural research ideas

By Kim Burgess
The Herald Journal

Published: Friday, May 8, 2009 2:55 AM CDT

Three visiting professors from Nigeria arrived at Utah State University in April, just in time to have their first experience with snow.

Irene Ifeoma Ijeh, Uma Kalu Oke and Alex Nwanze Awurum are spending a month in Logan familiarizing themselves with new agricultural research techniques through USU’s Center for Integrated BioSystems and College of Agriculture. The trio is from Michael Okpara University of Agriculture in Umudike, a rural city about 100 miles from the Atlantic Ocean.

The visit is part of Nigeria’s effort to develop universities based on the U.S. Land Grant system, according to Roger Kjelgren, Professor of Plants, Soils and Climate Department at Utah State.



(Photo courtesy Gary Neuenswander.)

Alex Nwanze Awurum, Irene Ifeoma Ijeh, and Uma Kalu Oke, from Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Nigeria

One of the professors — Ijeh — actually hopes to replicate the Center for Integrated BioSystems in her own country. The USU institution studies biotechnology issues like protein analysis and gene sequencing.

“We would like to start research collaborations between USU and our university in common areas of interest,” said Ijeh, who researches how eating vegetables can help with cancer treatment in her role as director of the Centre for Molecular Bioscience and Biotechnology. “We would also like to visit more universities in the future, including exchange trips with USU faculty to look at biodiversity.”

While at USU, the three professors hope to pick up a number of new skills.

As deputy dean of his school’s College of Animal Science and Production, Oke’s primary area of study is poultry. He is observing DNA sequencing in Ken White’s laboratory in the department of animal, dairy and veterinary sciences. Those skills will be applied toward breeding practices that will improve indigenous chickens.

Awurum is an expert in plant pathology and is the deputy dean of the College of Crop and Soil Science. His focus will be learning about pathogen identification to improve the quality of crops.

The visit was organized by Michael Okpara University Vice chancellor and professor Ikenna Onyido, who visited USU in November 2007. On that trip, he met Alvan Hengge from the USU chemistry department and began building a connection with programs in the College of Agriculture.

“Ikenna is trying very hard to make a difference in African, specifically Nigerian, higher education, and in many ways is building a brighter future for Africa and these three professors really do share that vision,” said Kjelgren.

E-mail:

kburgess@hjnews.com