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Plant Protection Today: USDA Employees Share their Safeguarding Knowledge with African Nations

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Cover Photo: The Africa Phytosanitary Project fostered an environment of knowledge exchange, hands-on skill development, and strategic networking which will help Africa manage plant pests and diseases that threaten food security.

Science & Technology Merge to Combat Plant Pests in Africa

By Sharon Lucik

At the African Food Systems Forum, Under Secretary Jenny Moffitt announced [USDA's partnership with the International Plant Protection Convention \(IPPC\) and the African Union](#) to provide advanced tools to prevent, detect, and manage plant pests and diseases. Weeks later, a small team of employees from USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) traveled to Cairo Egypt to launch phase one of the [African Phytosanitary Program](#) (APP).

"This initiative was one of the most challenging, rewarding, and inspiring experience of my career. It was a monumental effort, and everyone delivered," said Director of Data Analysis and Targeting and APP co-lead Adam Brookbank, with APHIS' Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) program. "Initially, we worked across PPQ to develop the pest protocols and interactive survey mobile applications. Then in September, we presented a high-level overview to the IPPC and United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization in Rome, Italy. Following that, we headed to Cairo for the weeklong train-the-trainer event."

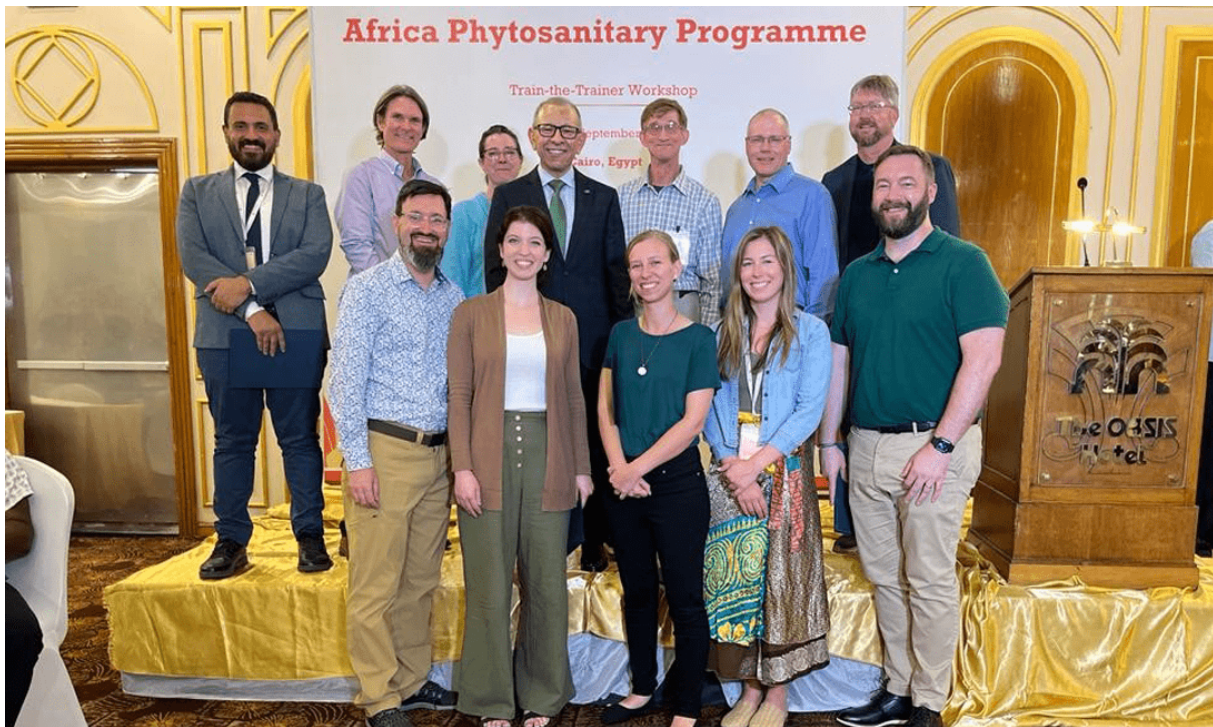


According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, family farms feed and employ two-thirds of the African population and work 62 percent of the land. Family farms outside of Cairo Egypt produce for subsistence and local markets.

PPQ organized a train-the-trainer workshop for maximum engagement and included classroom lectures, demonstrations, and hands-on field simulations using electronic data collection tools and apps. Focusing on 10 plant pests and pathogens significant to Africa, the team guided national plant protection organization (NPPO) staff from across Africa in survey protocols, mobile survey tool use, plant pest surveys, and diagnostics. In addition, all materials, including two customized mobile apps, were available in English, Portuguese, Arabic, and French. This first phase of the APP's initiative included 60 phytosanitary personnel from 11 countries—Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Guinea Bissau, Kenya, Mali, Morocco, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

In addition, APHIS' International Services staff provided invaluable services to our travelers and those in attendance. They ensured USDA's funding transmission to IPPC, fast-tracked passports and visas, and provided on-the-ground embassy support and technical support for the classroom instruction.

According to the IPPC, Africa loses billions of dollars in crop damages each year from pests, which impacts food security and economic growth. Globally, as much as 40 percent of crop yield is lost to plant pests, and that translates to about USD 220 billion in economic losses. Incorporating science and technology to address pest problems in Africa will help their policy makers and plant health communities make informed decisions on pest prevention, containment, or eradication, as well as trade-related matters.



Front row, left to right: Assistant Director of National Identification Services Jesse Hardin, Pest Survey Specialists Brianna Flonc and Mariah Davis, GIS Specialist Melanie Meroni, and Molecular Biologist John Bienapfl. Back row, left to right: APHIS International Services' Agriculture Specialist Ahmed Elsayed, Data Analysis Risk and Targeting Director and Africa Phytosanitary Project (APP) co-lead Adam Brookbank, Geographer Jennifer Sauer, International Plant Protection Convention Secretary and former PPQ Deputy Administrator Osama El-Lissy, Risk Analyst Peter Hertl, National Operations Director and APP co-lead Jeff Hash, and National Operations Manager Darrel Bays.

"This is a history-making program, and the team was thrilled and honored to be a part of its inauguration," Brookbank said. "It underscores the significance of international collaboration in safeguarding agricultural integrity and environmental sustainability. By combining the prowess of USDA, the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization, and the IPPC, this initiative promises to elevate the capabilities of NPPOs, fortify regional resilience, and help Africa move toward a more secure and sustainable plant health future."

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