

DSU's Dr. Vincent Fondong Receives \$1M Research Grant

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Dr. Vincent N. Fondong, DSU professor of biology, grew up working in cassava fields of his native Cameroon.



Now, he has been awarded a \$1 million competitive research grant to fight viruses that threaten that major food staple crop in his native country as well as in parts of Africa and the Indian subcontinent.

Dr. Fondong, the principal investigator, was awarded the three-year grant from a partnership between the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the National Science Foundation. His project relates to one of the primary aims of the Gates Foundation – to enhance health care and reduce extreme poverty.

Cassava produces edible tuberous roots and is the third-largest source of carbohydrates in the tropical regions of the world. It is part of the diet of about 500 million people worldwide. Cassava yields around the world are reduced by plant viruses such as African cassava mosaic virus and the cassava brown streak virus.

In this research project, Dr. Fondong will genetically engineer cassava for resistance to these viruses.

Dr. Fondong's cassava research took him this summer to Cameroon and Uganda in west and east Africa, respectively.

“In Cameroon during this trip, I was able to isolate some of these viruses for my research,” Dr. Fondong said. “Cameroon is a country where we are intensifying our efforts because it is a new hot spot for these viruses.”

Collaborating with Dr. Fondong are three co-principal investigators: Dr. Stephen Winter, German Collection of Microorganisms and Cell Culture, Braunschweig, Germany; Dr. Kone Mongomake, University of Abobo-Adjame, Ivory Coast; and Dr. Oumar Doungous, Institute of Agriculture Research for Development, Cameroon.

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“Our mandate is to come up with a solution for the whole of Africa that could also be applied to the Indian subcontinent and Latin America,” said Dr. Fondong, who has been a DSU faculty member since 2002.



(L-r) Latasha Keller and Brittany Marine, biological science graduate students check on some cassava plant samples in Mishoe Science Center refrigerator, Dr. Fondong's project give graduate and undergraduate students an opportunity take part in the research work.

The award, which was one of three awards nationwide this year, comes from the BREAD – Basic Research to Enable Agriculture Development program– which was established by the Gates Foundation/NSF partnership as a competitive award program for science research projects that address drought, pests, disease and other serious problems facing small farmers and their families.

Grants are awarded to projects like Dr. Fondong's that seek to develop innovative approaches and technologies to boost agriculture productivity in developing countries.

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