

**ACSF Topical Lunch:
Lessons Learned from Participatory Agroecological
Farmer-Farmer Networks in Malawi for Food Sovereignty and Resilience**

**April 9, 2015
12:00-1:00pm, 300 Rice Hall
Rachel Bezner-Kerr, Sera Young**

Background

The Malawi Farmer-to-Farmer Agroecology project is a participatory research project which uses agroecological methods to improve food security and nutrition in Malawi. Over 6000 farmers are working with this project, which is based in both northern and central Malawi, and involves a partnership with the University of Malawi, Ekwendeni Hospital, the University of Western Ontario, Cornell University and the University of Manitoba. The project grew out of long-term participatory research with the Soils, Food and Healthy Communities project. The initial focus was legume intercrops as a means to improve food security, soil fertility and child nutrition, but we have since expanded to incorporate an agroecological approach more broadly, including agroforestry, mulching and crop diversification. Farmers are also experimenting with local open-pollinated varieties of orange maize.

We use a participatory research model – farmers do their own experiments, and teach other farmers about their findings. As this research project is aimed at improving food security, nutrition, and more equitable communities, we integrate a range of educational approaches, including drama, recipe days, and farmer apprenticeships. Our goal is to support rural Malawians in building sustainable, healthy, equitable, resilient communities, using farmer-led, participatory research, ecological approaches to farming, local indigenous knowledge and democratic processes, while addressing economic, health and social inequalities at the household, community and national levels in Malawi. We have shown improvements in child nutrition, food security and soil management for smallholder farming families, and have many peer-reviewed scientific publications about our work.

Rachel Bezner Kerr is the Project Director of the Malawi Farmer-to-Farmer Agroecology Project, and is currently co-leading a participatory curriculum research project funded by an Academic Venture Fund of ACSF. The ‘farmer-led’ curriculum will integrate climate change, agroecology, social equity and nutrition. Drs. Laurie Drinkwater, Sera Young and David Wolfe are co-PIs with the curriculum project.

Six Malawian colleagues, including farmers, youth leaders and a professor of humanities involved with the project are currently visiting Cornell and farmers in the Ithaca, NY area to learn about related US based activities and share information. To learn more about the program, see: www.soilandfood.org.