

*“Globalization is accelerating and the need to understand the world is more important than ever...”*

# ACKER: AGRICULTURE IS POWERFUL TOOL V

By Melea Reicks Licht



Photo: Bob Elbert

*David Acker helps align college priorities with issues facing global society and ensures quality academic experiences for students.*

**L**anding in Greece with 10 Greek words in his vocabulary, David Acker felt like a Boy Scout dropped off in the woods during a survival exercise. In a way, he was.

Acker, associate dean for academic and global programs, learned not only how to survive in a foreign land during his first trip abroad in 1972, but how to thrive.

“I learned the importance of listening and understanding as a first step in operating in a cross-cultural setting and the importance of learning foreign languages as a way to break down barriers and understand a culture at a deeper level,” he says.

His dedication for international agricultural development took root during three years of service as a recent college graduate at the American Farm School in Greece. Later, it grew in Africa where he worked for four years in farmer training and rural development after earning his master’s degrees.

“My experience in Tanzania showed me the importance of education for farmers with limited resources,” he says.

Before he was 20, Acker had spent time working and living in the South Bronx and Appalachia, which sparked his interest in how communities cope with poverty. In Appalachia he discovered the way agricul-

ture could empower the poor, and in rural Greece and Tanzania he realized the universal nature of its power.

“Agriculture is the principal basis for rural economic development. It is a tool individuals can use to work themselves out of poverty,” he says.

It was that sense of empowerment that attracted Acker to work in international agricultural development and education.

After working for Tanzania’s ministry of agriculture, Acker joined the staff of Oregon State University. He continued his efforts in Africa through a U.S. Agency for International Development research contract. He went on to serve as Oregon State’s director of international research and development.

Acker landed at ISU as the director of the college’s international programs in 1995 and became assistant dean in 2001. His role was expanded to include academic programs in 2004. The change allowed more international activities to be integrated into the academic mission of the college. The college is one of the



**David Acker** visits with two farmers from Kamuli District, Uganda. Acker says, "We have a responsibility to contribute to the food security of our state as well as the world we live in."


# S. POVERTY

nation's leaders in sending students abroad to study.

"Globalization is accelerating and the need to understand the world is more important than ever, but our resources to give students the necessary experiences are more limited," he says. "Fortunately, private donors are stepping up and allowing us to meet this challenge."

Acker's coordination of academic programs includes distance education, outcomes assessment, student services, student recruitment and retention, career services, multicultural programs, scholarships, study abroad programs and international partnerships.

He has been a Fulbright research fellow, served as a consultant in eight countries and has served as the president of the Association for International Agricultural and Extension Education.

Acker remains involved with the American Farm School in Greece that sparked his passion. He currently serves on their board of trustees. And he's very comfortable conversing in Greek. 

## DAVID ACKER: COMPASS POINTS

**Titles:** Associate dean of academic and global programs, Raymond and Mary Baker Chair in Global Agriculture, professor of agricultural education and studies

**Alma maters:** Alice Lloyd College (AA '73 sociology); Wilmington College (BA '75 agriculture/sociology); University of California, Davis (MS '80 international agricultural development; MEd '80 agricultural education); Oregon State (PhD '89 vocational education)

**Why he does what he does:** "We have the top food and agriculture experts in the world working at ISU. If we can't address world hunger now, then who and when? We have a responsibility to contribute to the food security of our state as well as the world we live in."

**What he sees in our students:** "Our students won't just be prepared to work for the World Bank and the United Nations, they'll be prepared to lead those organizations."

**Comprendo?** Has studied Latin, Greek, Spanish and Swahili

**Up in the air:** Travels 70 days per year, visited 12 countries last year

**Pen to paper:** Acker and Lavinia Gasperini wrote *Education for Rural People: The role of education, training and capacity development in poverty reduction and food security* in 2009, published by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, available in English, French, Spanish and Italian.

**Dream destination:** "I have visited approximately 50 countries out of a total of more than 200 countries in the world so I have a lot of territory left to explore. I enjoy working most in East Africa largely because I enjoy the people we work with from farmers to politicians."

**Boy Scout Rank:** Eagle

