60 Years of Leadership of African Food Security Research, Outreach And Capacity Building at MSU
Africa close to professor’s heart

With a giant map hanging on his wall and pictures of tribal pottery sitting on his desk, Carl Eicher makes no attempt at hiding his love for Africa.

It’s a love that has been ongoing for 37 years and was capped off in July when Eicher, an MSU distinguished professor of agricultural economics, was awarded an honorary doctor of science degree from the University of Zimbabwe. He was awarded the degree for his years of service in helping to develop the school’s agricultural program.

“It’s been a wonderful experience going over there and seeing the improvements that have been made to the university,” Eicher said. “When you look at what’s happened, especially over the course of a generation, it’s amazing.”

Eicher made his first trip to the continent in 1961 with a group of MSU professors who wanted to help develop Nigeria’s economy. Since then, Eicher estimates he has made more than 90 trips to various African countries, all with the same mission.

Carl Eicher, an MSU distinguished professor of agricultural economics, sits in his office in Agriculture Hall on Friday. He recently received an honorary doctor of science degree from the University of Zimbabwe. He received the honorary degree for his help in developing an agriculture program and integrating the student body at the the University of Zimbabwe.

“(Former MSU President John) Hannah made it a commitment of the university to develop relationships with the 16 African countries that had just won their independence,” he said. “Since then, the whole scope of MSU has changed. We have a constant exchange of students back and forth between here and the University of Zimbabwe.”

Since the country won independence in 1980, Eicher said MSU’s relationship with Zimbabwe has become its largest and most rewarding. Since then, Zimbabwe has made great strides at developing its land, economy and resources, he said.

Cameroun Project Basketball Team
MSU project helps feed African nation

MSU's Department of Agricultural Economics and the West African country of Senegal have joined hands on a five-year, $4.7 million contract designed to strengthen that country's agricultural research system.

Funded in part by the U.S. Agency for International Development and the government of Senegal, the five-year project seeks to improve the capacity of the Senegalese Institute for Agricultural Research to carry out cost-effective research which is relevant to the needs of small farmers and herders in five agro-ecological zones in the country.

MSU's role in the project includes providing research advisors to Senegal, computer and library assistance and overseeing the placement of 24 Senegalese agricultural scientists in master's degree programs in eight or nine U.S. universities, including MSU. MSU will convene a special Summer Institute on Survey Research and Micro-Computers for the Senegalese students being trained in the United States.

Although Senegal has been independent since 1960, only one-third of the 100 agricultural researchers in Senegal are Senegalese.

According to project director Carl K. Eicher, an MSU professor of agricultural economics, one goal of the project is to help the country expand its research on food crops because Senegal is a food-deficit country.

Eicher says MSU's past technical and research experience in Africa made the University a highly desirable component in the project. He says the University's chief concern is training Senegalese agricultural scientists, who will receive instruction at MSU in survey research organization, research methodology, data collection and processing. These students will go back to Senegal to collect data for their master's degrees, and then return to their U.S. institutions to complete requirements of their degree programs.

An equally important part of the project involves the stationing of MSU faculty researchers in Senegal for work on four-year assignments. Two MSU researchers already are in Senegal, with two more scheduled for deployment in 1984. The two current researchers are R. James Bingen, field project leader in Dakar, Senegal, and Mulumba Kamusungu, a farming systems economist in southern Senegal. Another researcher—a macro-economist—is scheduled for deployment within a few months.

"This could be the first phase of a 10 to 15 year effort," Eicher says enthusiastically. "We're not going to save the world with this project, but we will make a contribution."

Eicher says Senegal already has purchased five micro-computers, for which MSU will provide the training. The computers, he says, facilitate more efficient research on local and regional problems. The software makes possible communication between research teams throughout this West African country of six million people.

Other MSU personnel involved in the project are: Darrell Fieup, an agricultural economist serving as the project's MSU coordinator; Carl Eicher (center), project director and an MSU agricultural economist; and R. James Bingen (right), project leader in Dakar.

Three key personnel involved in the MSU-Senegal project are Darrell Fieup (left), an agricultural economist serving as the project's MSU coordinator; Carl Eicher (center), project director and an MSU agricultural economist; and R. James Bingen (right), project leader in Dakar.
1956 – Farmers' Week programs have been an important feature of the Department's activities ever since 1930, over 40 years ago. For about 20 years, 1930 to 1949, the Departments of Farm Management and Economics had their own programs and clientele. Since the merger of the agricultural economics area of economics with farm management in 1949, there has been one combined program. Picture shows the Ag Econ Committee preparing for the 1956 Farmers' Week at Michigan State University. From left to right: Henry Larzelere; James Shaffer; John C. Doneth, committee chairman; Richard G. Wheeler; and Carl Eicher.