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MSU experts help East Africa model climate change

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Drought blamed on global warming is the latest source of uncertainty for East African farmers, and experts at Michigan State University are working to develop climate data that helps growers pick crops that can take the heat.

The project, financed by a Rockefeller Foundation grant, will focus on the effects of climate change on Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

"This part of Africa is getting over the worst drought it has had in many years," said lead researcher Jennifer Olson. "Climate change is leading to warmer temperatures and heightened water stress for plants, as well as less reliable rain."

Participants include "geographers, agronomists, sociologists and climatologists at MSU and in East Africa," university spokeswoman Kristen Parker said in a posting on the school's Web site.

The researchers will make use of a Michigan State supercomputer and resources from the Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station to create a regional climate model that includes crop and water data, the school said.

"This will enable agriculture specialists to determine the impact of climate change on different crop varieties," Parker said. "As a result, they will develop crop varieties that better withstand climate change."

The New York-based Rockefeller Foundation's \$430,000 grant to Michigan State is part of its \$70 million Climate Change Resilience Initiative.

"Most of our research has focused on the causes and consequences of climate change," said geographer Nathan Moore. "This grant will apply those results in a new way by asking African specialists what their information needs are, and how they want us to help."

The Michigan State researchers also plan to train their African counterparts in interpreting crop and climate data, he said.