



**AMBASSADOR LEWIS A. LUKENS
USAID: STUDY TOUR SEND-OFF
REMARKS
MARCH 28, 2012**

(as prepared for delivery)

Thank you.

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to my home. I am pleased to host this informal send-off ceremony as you embark upon what I hope will be a very fruitful study tour of two universities in the United States and one in East Africa.

As some of the country's leading minds in agricultural research and enterprise, you are aware of the critical importance of your work to Senegal's efforts to maintain food security and foster a vibrant economy.

Despite its well-deserved reputation as one of the most stable and promising countries in the West African region, Senegal has still experienced low economic growth rates in recent years, and only a small percentage of that growth can be attributed to the agriculture sector. Poor infrastructure, longstanding underinvestment, and an inhibiting policy environment continue to thwart the efforts of the agricultural community.

To spark innovation in the agricultural sector and allow Senegal to assume a leadership role in securing food security for the African continent, there have to be strong linkages between agricultural training, research and outreach, and the private sector.

The U.S. government recognizes this key goal, and we have gathered you here today to offer you the chance to investigate successful public-private practices in the United States.

During your visits to Virginia Tech University, Tuskegee University in Alabama, and Makerere University in Uganda, you will see firsthand best practices that have worked for leading international agriculture researchers, and I know that this will inspire you to develop similar innovative practices for Senegal.

And that's not the only benefit. During the field visits, you will meet academic researchers; members of the entrepreneurial agro-business community; and other hard-working members of your field. The networks that you create during this trip can, and should, develop into lasting collaborative relationships that have the potential to blossom into permanent economic linkages; create resources for innovation

and collaboration with the private sector when designing and reviewing curriculum; and facilitate partnerships between academia and the private sector.

All of these advantages will translate into a brighter future for the agricultural leaders of tomorrow, who will benefit from the advances you make.

For all the participants, travel safely; come back to us with new ideas; create those important networks; and enjoy the beauty of the U.S. – as my wife Lucy could tell you, the south in the spring is a magnificent place to be as the flower trees and azalea bushes begin to bloom.

Thank you.