

Getting up to speed on local rice research

I had the privilege of visiting and engaging with researchers at the [Indian Institute of Rice Research](#) in Hyderabad last week.

It was a great opportunity to see the exciting rice science being conducted, but also the focused commitment of IIRR Director, Dr. V Ravindra Babu, to demand-driven innovation to ensure the science of IIRR is focused on addressing the pressing needs of smallholder rice farmers.

Approximately 45 scientists toured with me and Dr Babu to see field experiments on climate change, low soil fertility, integrated pest and disease management and the application of molecular markers to support variety development. I was interested to see IIRR being a key partner in grants I managed while at the Gates Foundation; these include Stress Tolerant Rice for Africa and South Asia, Cereal System Initiative for South Asia, C4-Rice and Green Super Rice.

In the field I saw trials of rice grown with a border crop of flowers to support bio-control agents and potentially reduce pesticide use in stem borer control. I was told rice farmers now contend with up to 15 pests - while there were only three when the Institute first started in 1965! This is the result of crop intensification, climate change and increased global food movement.

We viewed a chamber established under the [National Initiative on Climate Resilient Agriculture](#) (NICRA) which grows rice at elevated temperatures to screen rice varieties for heat tolerance. IIRR have shown it is the chemistry of the female stamen to receive the pollen of the male plant that is impacted by high temperature and results in lower seed set. Another trial was screening for low phosphorous tolerance in rice.

I also spotted trials of strains of [Green Super Rice](#) from China bred for water and nitrogen use efficiency that I had previously been involved in while at the Gates Foundation. I finished the day visiting the rice museum after interacting with all the Institute's scientists.

I look forward to ICRISAT and IIRR continuing to build awareness of our work within our Institutes and working together to offer farm families integrated solutions to increase farm profitability, sustainability and resilience to climate change.