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Benefits of International Research and Collaborations to U.S. Agriculture and Farmers*

Special Side Event at the 2025 World Food Prize Symposium
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Summary

International cooperation and collaboration have long been a cornerstone of U.S. land-grant universities, industry, and other organizations. For decades, collaborative research, education, outreach, and technology-transfer programs have advanced globally through support from U.S. government, industry, foundations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and private donors. These engagements have transformed agriculture — boosting productivity, food and nutritional security, economic growth, and livelihoods — while delivering tangible benefits to U.S. farmers, consumers, industry, and public research institutions, among others. Achievements include knowledge and technology exchanges, human and institutional capacity building, and policy reforms that enable technology access, trade, and the opening of new markets for U.S. products. This paper draws from a special panel organized by Michigan State University at the World Food Prize Symposium in Des Moines, Iowa, on October 23, 2025. The paper highlights the transformative role of international partnerships in strengthening American agriculture and U.S. farming communities and industries. Through compelling case studies, it demonstrates how global collaborations mutually enhance U.S. agri-food systems and benefit their global partners. These efforts leverage the power of global engagement to secure a safer, stronger, and more prosperous future for U.S. agriculture, agriculture industries, local farmers, and consumers.

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Introduction and Context

Global food insecurity has risen since 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, supply disruptions, and conflicts such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization, more than 730 million people are undernourished, with the largest share in Africa. Poverty remains the primary driver: When people are poor, they are more likely to experience hunger, which can fuel conflict, migration, and long-term developmental harm. Malnutrition also affects children's cognitive development and productivity. As Norman Borlaug famously stated, "Peace cannot be built on empty stomachs."

Agriculture is central to addressing these challenges. Roughly three-quarters of the world's poorest people live in rural areas and depend on agriculture, yet many smallholder farmers — most cultivating fewer than five acres — face low productivity and limited access to technology. This creates a cycle of hunger, poverty, and instability with broader economic and security implications.

International cooperation has long been a hallmark of U.S. agricultural engagement abroad. Partnerships among U.S. land-grant universities, industry, foundations, NGOs, and government agencies have implemented collaborative research, education, and technology transfer programs worldwide. Initiatives supported by organizations such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the USDA Foreign Agricultural Service, and the Millennium Challenge Corporation have helped farmers adopt improved technologies, strengthen agricultural institutions, and increase productivity and incomes.

These programs also benefit the U.S. (See Box 1). International agricultural research strengthens U.S. universities, expands markets for American products, and improves global supply chains that support U.S. consumers and industry. While concerns about foreign competitors — highlighted by Brazil's soybean expansion and policies such as the Bumpers Amendment — have occasionally shaped policy debates, decades of experience show that agricultural development abroad often creates new markets rather than undermining U.S. agriculture.

This perspective informed a special panel organized by Michigan State University at the World Food Prize Symposium. The discussion highlighted how global agricultural partnerships strengthen food security, support U.S. farmers and innovation systems, and contribute to a more stable and prosperous world.

U.S. Investments in Global Agriculture Development

Dr. Robert Bertram, Chief Scientist, Food Security Leadership Council

U.S. Leadership in Global Agricultural Development

For decades, the U.S. has been a global leader in international agricultural development and food assistance. Major investments in agricultural research, development programs, and humanitarian aid have

Box 1. Benefits of International Collaborations to U.S. Agriculture, Farmers, and Researchers

- Trade opportunities
- New markets
- Access to technologies
- Protection of biodiversity and natural resources
- Access to germplasm for genetic improvement
- Imports of safer products
- Improved food safety and protection
- Reduced threats from foreign pests and diseases
- Reduced migration
- New food products for consumers
- Stabilized prices and supply chains for imports

significantly improved food security and economic growth worldwide (See Box 2). Historically, the U.S. provided about 50% to 60% of global food aid, much of it administered through USAID. Programs such as Feed the Future, Collaborative Research Support Programs, and support for the CGIAR helped strengthen food systems, boost agricultural productivity, and reduce poverty in developing countries.

Box 2. Benefits of International Collaborations to Global Community

- Food and nutritional security
- Poverty reduction
- Human and institutional capacity strengthening
- Creation of safer and stronger supply chains
- Import and export opportunities
- Access to knowledge and technologies
- Agribusiness development
- Establishment of functional regulatory systems
- Reduced reliance on food aid

Mutual Benefits for the United States of America

International agricultural cooperation has delivered significant benefits to both partner countries and the U.S. By improving agricultural productivity and livelihoods abroad, these programs have helped stabilize economies and expand markets for U.S. agricultural products and technologies. U.S. farmers have benefited through increased trade, improved research capacity at American universities, and stronger global supply chains. University-led collaborations — particularly through U.S. land-grant institutions — have generated innovations in crops such as wheat, rice, sorghum, peanuts, and dry beans, producing billions of dollars in domestic benefits. Since none of our major crops originated in the U.S., many of the crop innovations have come from germplasm from abroad. This model reflects the principle often described as “doing well by doing good.”

Strategic Importance of Research Collaboration

International research partnerships also strengthen U.S. agricultural readiness and security. Collaborative work helps monitor pests and diseases before they reach American farms and supports preparedness for global health threats, including zoonotic diseases such as Ebola and COVID-19. Cooperation on biotechnology, trade policy, and food safety has expanded export markets for U.S. commodities, improved regulatory systems abroad, and enhanced the safety of imported foods consumed in the U.S. These partnerships also build long-term relationships with emerging economies, strengthening U.S. influence and leadership.

Policy Shifts and Future Concerns

Despite these benefits, recent policy changes have raised concerns about the future of U.S. leadership in international agricultural development. Significant reductions in foreign assistance funding and the restructuring of USAID have halted or reduced many programs, including research collaborations such as Innovation Labs. These changes come even though foreign assistance represents only a small share of the U.S. federal budget, yet historically has delivered substantial humanitarian, economic, and strategic returns.

Greater Stability in Developing Countries Leads to Improved U.S. National Security

Greater stability in developing countries contributes directly to improved U.S. national security. When countries experience stronger **socio-political stability**, migration pressures toward the U.S. decrease. **Economic development** in these regions creates stronger international partners and reduces terrorism and conflict abroad, which in turn expands U.S. trade and investment opportunities (Price, 2025). More reliable global systems also mean fewer supply chain disruptions, helping stabilize food prices for American consumers. Supporting this notion,

a special luncheon discussion on February 25, 2026, held by the University of Nebraska U.S. Global Leadership Coalition (USGLC) advisory committee, highlighted that strategic international assistance enhances U.S. national security while simultaneously opening new markets and boosting agricultural opportunities for U.S. farmers. The event emphasized that global engagement and food security programs directly contribute to the U.S. economy, rural communities, and jobs.

Health and nutritional security also play a critical role. Strong health systems abroad help prevent the spread of infectious diseases, protecting populations globally, including in the U.S. Additionally, biodiversity in less-developed countries serves as an important source for pharmaceutical innovation. Improved food security can have **positive environmental impacts** as well, by reducing the need for deforestation and thereby protecting vital natural resources that benefit the entire world, as some are only found in developing countries.

Additionally, aid programs help **promote shared cultural values** and reduce anti-American sentiment, strengthening diplomatic relationships. Overall, improving food security abroad enhances U.S. national security, and investments in agriculture support stability, expand trade, and build resilience both internationally and domestically.

Case Studies of Benefits of U.S. Engagement in Global Agriculture

1. Case Study of Michigan Milk Producers Association (MMPA) and Anand Dairy Milk Union, Limited (AMUL) partnership

Ms. Sheila Burkhardt, Chief Corporate Affairs Officer, Michigan Milk Producers Association (MMPA; https://www.mimilk.com/), Michigan, U.S.A., presented the case study of the partnership between MMPA and Anand Dairy Milk Union, Limited (AMUL; https://www.amuldairy.com/) Dairy in India.

The MMPA is a dairy farmer-owned milk marketing cooperative with members in Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, and Wisconsin. In September 2017, MMPA representatives gave a presentation at an industry breakfast, where representatives from MSU College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (CANR) and the Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF) of India were in attendance. Amul is a member of GCMMF, along with several dairy unions in the Gujarat State of India. The GCMMF representatives were in Michigan for a special MSU recognition of Dr. Verghese Kurien. Dr. Kurien, who passed away in 2012, had received his master's degree from MSU and became known as the "Father of the White Revolution" in India for his leadership in the cooperative movement and the dairy industry.

Following the initial meeting, conversations with GCMMF representatives continued. The following year, 25 leaders of dairy cooperatives from across India visited Michigan State University and MMPA. The relationship between MMPA and GCMMF continued to develop, and in 2023, representatives of both organizations met at the International Dairy Federation Summit in Chicago. A partnership between MMPA and GCMMF was announced at MMPA's Annual Meeting in March 2024 to provide Amul-branded fluid milk products in the U.S. market. By combining MMPA's technology and high-quality milk from MMPA members with Amul's globally recognized reputation, the collaboration creates new opportunities for both MMPA and Amul, while honoring the cultural connection that Indian communities in the U.S. hold with the Amul brand.

Amul milk was launched in the U.S. in May 2024, with the first trial run showcased at the celebration/product launch at the Consulate General of India in New York on May 1, 2024. The current types of milk marketed under the Amul brand include: a) 2% fat Amul Slim-n-Trim, b) 3.25% fat Amul "Taaza," c) 4.5% fat Amul "Shakti," and d) 6% fat Amul Gold. The MMPA also markets Amul Chass (buttermilk) and Amul high-protein, low-sugar chocolate milk.

Products are available through a large national retailer and in various states through a network of stores that cater to Indian markets.

The International Programs of MSU CANR has been instrumental in connecting MMPA to GCMMF member dairy cooperatives. The partnership has brought together the world's largest farmer-owned dairy cooperative with America's ninth largest dairy cooperative. This unique partnership between MMPA and Amul marks the first time Amul-branded fresh milk is being launched outside of India.

2. Case Study of Purdue University

Dr. Gerald Shively, Associate Dean and Director of International Programs in Agriculture, and Professor of Agricultural Economics, Purdue University, Indiana, U.S.A., presented the case study of Purdue University.

Many agricultural challenges and problems share common causes, and knowledge and technical innovations flow in both directions. Asian soybean rust is a fungal disease (caused by *Phakopsora pachyrhizi*) that affects soybean production worldwide. Collaborative research conducted by numerous partner institutions in South America in the early 2000s led to knowledge transfer back to the U.S., which has benefited the U.S. soybean industry. Tens of billions of dollars in losses from this disease were averted. Purdue's contributions have spanned diagnostics, monitoring systems, agronomic management research, genomics and genetics of soybeans (which underlie resistance breeding), and extension/outreach to prepare growers for the threat of soybean rust.

Similarly, Corn Tar Spot (a disease caused by *Phyllachora maydis*) originated in Mexico in 1904 and was first confirmed on U.S. farms (in Indiana and Illinois) in 2015. Purdue research conducted jointly with collaborators in Colombia, Mexico, Ecuador, and South Korea has focused on a mix of statistics, data science, epidemiology, microbiology, artificial intelligence, computer vision, and continual stakeholder feedback to better understand the dynamics of tar spot in corn and develop strategies to address it on U.S. farms.

Problems sometimes emerge first in the global south, where addressing them reduces risk and provides a runway to prepare domestic defenses in advance. African Swine Fever was detected in the Dominican Republic in 2022. The disease poses an incredible risk for U.S. swine farmers. Purdue University researchers worked with veterinarians in the Dominican Republic to develop tools for self-assessment, ultimately reducing the risk of transmission to U.S. farms. Similarly, Purdue University researchers are involved in collaborative research on Rift Valley fever, particularly in outbreak modeling, analytics, and preparedness efforts within zoonotic/foreign animal disease frameworks.

Addressing problems abroad often helps to stabilize global and U.S. agricultural markets. Improving cotton quality in West Africa through pest management and the establishment of trade standards helps to stabilize global cotton prices. Since the U.S. is one of the largest cotton exporters, stable prices and reductions in supply shocks protect American farmers' revenues. Purdue University researchers have contributed to cotton-related research in Mali and Burkina Faso, including work on the impacts of Bt cotton on local and global markets. Purdue-led research on food safety and improved storage and handling has also helped build and support reliable export markets in places such as Vietnam, which is now a reliable, top-10 export market for U.S. soybeans.

Basic research focused overseas often leads to surprising and positive applications in the U.S. Collaborative research initiated among Purdue University, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), Iowa State University, and International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) scientists more than 20 years ago focused on traditional breeding to develop maize varieties naturally rich in beta-carotene and other carotenoids — nutrients the human body can convert into vitamin A. The initial goal was to address vitamin A deficiencies in Sub-Saharan Africa, where maize is a staple and diets often lack sufficient vitamin A. An unintended discovery was that, when used as poultry feed, orange maize has demonstrated benefits in animal welfare/health and egg quality. Orange

maize varieties are now being commercialized and adopted by U.S. farmers to improve feed and productivity in the poultry industry.

3. Case Study of Michigan Bean Commission

Mr. Joe Cramer, Executive Director, Michigan Bean Commission, Frankenmuth, Michigan, U.S.A., presented the case study of the Michigan Bean Commission.

Annually, approximately every third row of Michigan's dry bean acreage is exported. For many years, Michigan's dry bean industry, growers, processors, etc., have benefited financially because of the focused research that is done at the USDA, the USAID-funded Legume Systems Innovation Lab managed by Michigan State University, and other bean research programs at Michigan State University.

These bean research programs actively collect germplasm from around the world, providing bean researchers with an expanded range of genetic options for breeding beans with desired characteristics. For example, researchers have developed high-yielding bean varieties with resistance to economically important bean diseases using this germplasm.

Through this research, Michigan's growers have had access to the most advanced genetics–the most disease-resistant, high-yielding, and highest-canning-quality varieties available in the world, allowing Michigan to continue to be a global leader as the most dependable supplier of the absolute best-quality edible beans.

More than 40 bean varieties now commercially grown in the U.S. have one or more parents from these programs. Nearly all of Michigan's 250,000 acres of dry beans are planted with seed that can trace its DNA back to this research. This same research allows slight modifications to adapt these high-producing genetics to nearly any region and/or climate.

Additionally, bean productivity has been boosted in the U.S. as a result of international agricultural research originally targeted to developing countries. Enhanced agricultural production technologies lower production costs, making U.S. agriculture more competitive in the global economy.

As farmers and consumers around the world become more aware of the environmental and health benefits of beans, continuing and expanding global research becomes even more important. Beans help address the challenges of global food and nutritional security and global health.

4. Case Study of Texas A&M University

Dr. Elsa A. Murano, Director, The Norman E. Borlaug Institute for International Agriculture, Texas A&M University, Texas, U.S.A., presented the case study on Texas A&M University.

There have been tremendous benefits of international collaboration for U.S. agriculture, including a 63% growth in U.S. agricultural exports from 2000 to 2020, totaling $53 billion. Developing countries accounted for more than half of these exports, with bulk commodity exports such as soybeans from the U.S. increasing by 77%, and high-value products by 125% over the 20-year period. This is because such exports are highly dependent on economic growth in developing countries; the stronger the economies of the countries we support, the more they are able to import from the U.S.

One such example is a project led by the Borlaug Institute in Central America, focused on helping coffee farmers address coffee leaf rust, a fungal disease, that was affecting production. Texas A&M provided them with a variety resistant to the fungus, resulting in highly significant production yields. Very notably, it led a Guatemalan farmer to

state that *"Because of the new hybrid, we can beat the disease, so there's no need for us to leave,"* emphasizing the benefit of mitigating migration. Even more importantly, imports of U.S. maize and soybean meal for livestock feed doubled, mainly because coffee farmers also raise livestock.

5. Case Study of Corteva Agriscience

Dr. Kevin Diehl, Global Regulatory Advocacy Director, Corteva Agriscience, Iowa, U.S.A., presented a case study on industry engagement in international agricultural development programs, highlighting the Corteva Agriscience Ag Accelerator program for improving crops through modern biotechnology tools, approaches, and technologies.

The Ag Accelerator program is collaborating to develop solutions to help smallholder farmers enhance agricultural productivity and thereby produce more food. This program is also serving as a catalyst to drive Corteva's innovation hub.

Corteva Agriscience is collaborating with various organizations in Kenya, France, and CGIAR centers with national programs in Kenya such as CIMMYT and ICRISAT and land-grant universities. A few examples are as follows:

- Improve Disease Resistance: Maize Lethal Necrosis in Africa; Collaborators: Gates Foundation, International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT), Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organization (KALRO)
- Control Parasitic Plants: Striga-Resistant Sorghum; Collaborators: CIMMYT, International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), the Pennsylvania State University, Kenyata University in Nairobi, Kenya
- Reduce Mycotoxins: Aflatoxin Reduction in Groundnuts; Collaborators: Gates Foundation, CIMMYT, KALRO, Texas A&M University
- Broader Protein Production: Soybean Production in Europe; Collaborators: National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and Environment (INRAE) and Institut Jean-Pierre Bourgin (IJPB) in France
- Food Security: Crop Productivity, Build Climate Resilience; Collaborators: Gates Ag One

Corteva is also collaborating with the World Technology Access Program (WorldTAP) and Michigan State University in hosting regulators, legal personnel, and policy makers from Africa and Asia who are engaged in regulatory issues related to GMOs and genome-editing technologies for crop improvement, which is also helping to create an enabling environment in emerging markets in Africa and Asia for testing and commercialization of new technologies.

6. AgReach and Archer Daniels Midland Institute (ADMI), University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC)

Dr. Paul McNamara, Director of AgReach, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), Illinois, U.S.A. presented the case study of the University of Illinois's engagement in international agriculture and its benefits to U.S. farmers.

He highlighted the McGovern-Dole Program, which utilizes agricultural products produced in the U.S. to boost markets for U.S. farmers. The University of Illinois AgReach and Archer Daniels Midland Institute (ADMI) are partners on two USDA-funded McGovern-Dole Programs in Cameroon and Angola. The Food for Education programs rely on commodities produced by U.S. farmers. These programs improve education and nutrition, leading to economic development, which drives higher consumption of poultry, fish, and pork, further increasing the need and opportunity for U.S.-produced commodities and benefiting U.S. growers through the procurement of locally

produced grains. Enhanced food security through this program helps build peace and stability in the recipient countries.

In addition to the case studies presented by the panelists at the side event, there have been other notable examples of international agricultural development programs with U.S. engagement that provide mutual benefits to U.S. agriculture and industry. Two examples are as follows.

7. Case Study of Donald Danforth Plant Science Center Engagement in Africa

The Donald Danforth Plant Science Center, located in St. Louis, Missouri, is helping African farmers increase agricultural productivity through innovations like improved cowpea, virus-resistant cassava, and semi-dwarf teff. These efforts address food insecurity, poverty, and environmental strain while supporting Africa's rapidly growing population and economies. Stronger agriculture enables economic growth, job creation, and new markets. For St. Louis, this presents opportunities in trade, investment, and global leadership in agricultural technology. By investing in sustainable farming solutions, the Danforth Center fosters stability and shared prosperity, benefiting both African communities and St. Louis's economic future. For more information, please see this link: https://www.bizjournals.com/stlouis/news/2025/06/12/donald-danforth-plant-science-african-stlouis.html

8. Case Study of Michigan State University's World Technology Access Program (WorldTAP)

Dr. Karim Maredia, Professor and Director of World Technology Access Program (WorldTAP), College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Michigan State University, Michigan, U.S.A.

The World Technology Access Program (WorldTAP) in the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (CANR) at Michigan State University (MSU) has been partnering with the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD) in their efforts to strengthen regulatory frameworks in AU member countries in support of modern biotechnology and other emerging technologies for food, agriculture, health, and environment. MSU has been partnering with AUDA-NEPAD since 2009 through the sustained, long-term funding from the Gates Foundation.

MSU serves as an international partner of AUDA-NEPAD's African Biosafety Network of Expertise (ABNE), providing training, information, and networking opportunities to regulators from more than 15 African countries towards building functional biosafety regulatory systems. These efforts benefit U.S. seed and biotech companies, U.S. universities, and nonprofit organizations in transferring technologies for research field trials of genetically engineered crops, with the ultimate goal of commercializing safe biotech crops and creating an enabling regulatory environment for access to and imports of new technologies and biotech products by various African countries. This enhances agricultural productivity, food security, and economic growth, which in turn benefits U.S. industry.

Way Forward

The case studies and examples clearly highlight that U.S. investments through international collaborative programs bring mutual benefits to U.S. agriculture and farmers. The recent budget cuts by the U.S. federal government to international agricultural development programs have significantly impacted the engagement of U.S. land-grant universities, CGIAR centers, and U.S. industry programs globally. If the U.S. government's goals of making America safer, stronger, and more prosperous are to be achieved sustainably, efforts should be made to reengage and revive investments in international agricultural development programs. A small percentage of U.S. government investment would have a huge impact in building a peaceful, resilient, and food-secure world.

At this critical juncture, American universities need to consider and articulate the shared benefits that accrue from win-win research collaborations that reduce hunger, malnutrition, and extreme poverty in regions where these afflictions remain widespread. Moreover, universities—particularly land-grant universities and colleges—bring with them America's private sector, from producer groups to processors, traders, and life science companies. This coalition of actors, in partnership with both international and national partners, can generate substantial benefits in the U.S. and abroad as part of the nation's global engagement and leadership for years to come.

All of this needs to be viewed in the context of urgency, from threats right at our borders, where universities in front-line states serve as a first line of defense, to broader global issues that affect our farmers around the world. Extreme weather events, especially heat and drought, emerging diseases of crops and livestock (e.g., fusarium head blight in wheat), and respect for and openness to advanced science are all critical concerns. American universities are essential to realizing a vision of a food-secure, environmentally sound, economically sustainable, and peaceful world.

Happily, the U.S. government recognizes this, and recent signals from the administration echo these sentiments. Now, more than ever, good ideas are needed to show how America's universities can contribute, making this side event timely. A recent positive development is the U.S. State Department's call for proposals to establish seven new Innovation Labs that will take an "America-first" approach and design and implement new models and innovative approaches of agricultural research and development in a global context, bringing mutual benefits to U.S. agriculture and farmers, as well as agricultural development in targeted regions of the world.

List of Publications and Reports for Additional Information:

1. Priorities and Mission of the Second Trump Administration's Department of State, February 18, 2025: https://fr.usembassy.gov/president-trump-and-secretary-rubio-commit-to-making-america-safer-stronger-and-more-prosperous/
2. How the Donald Danforth Plant Science Center is helping African farmers — and why that's good for St. Louis: https://www.bizjournals.com/stlouis/news/2025/06/12/donald-danforth-plant-science-african-stlouis.html
3. What U.S. Farmers Get from America's Engagement in the UN – and What We Lose When We Walk Away: https://betterworldcampaign.org/blog/what-us-farmers-get-from-americas-engagement-in-the-un
4. Kansas Feeds the World: How Agricultural Partnerships Strengthen U.S. Global Leadership. September 3, 2025 By Maggie Carr: https://www.usglc.org/blog/intern-blog-series-kansas-feeds-the-world-how-agricultural-partnerships-strengthen-u-s-global-leadership/
5. Board for International Food and Agricultural Development (BIFAD); International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI); Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU), 'How the United States benefits from agricultural and food security investments in developing countries', International Food Policy Research Institute, Washington, DC, 2019: https://gender.cgiar.org/publications/how-united-states-benefits-agricultural-and-food-security-investments-developing
6. "Global Food Security is National Security: How Hunger and Malnutrition Abroad Make the U.S. Less Safe," Dr. Ed Price, Texas A&M University, Wednesday, December 3, 2025 at Michigan State University
7. USGLC Luncheon: International assistance strengthens U.S. national security, expands Nebraska ag opportunities. The Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute at the University of Nebraska March Water for Food Digest. March 17, 2026. When America Leads, Nebraska Wins – USGLC
8. "Michigan Milk Producers Association partners with well-known, international brand Amul," MMPA News, March 25, 2024. https://www.mimilk.com/michigan-milk-producers-association-partners-with-well-known-international-brand-amul/