

Conference Opening Remarks

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Hon Ernest Debrah, Minister of Food and Agriculture, Dr. Monty Jones, Executive Secretary FARA and our Key Note Speaker, invited guests, participants ladies and gentlemen, all protocols observed. On behalf of the AAAE, and on my own behalf, I would like to welcome all of you to the second AAAE conference. We are particularly grateful to you Mr. Minister for having had time to come to grace the opening of the conference despite your busy schedules. We also thank the Department of Agricultural Economics, University of Ghana and through it, the University, the Government and Peoples of the Republic of Ghana for hosting the conference.

Since its inauguration in 2004, the AAAE has attracted a lot of interest among the agricultural economists and related professionals. Part of the reason is to do with the special position and role our profession holds in the field of growth and development, which is Africa's big agenda now. To the extent that development is clearly multidimensional and must be seen and understood through the prism of *multidisciplinary foci*, our profession is well placed to bring all the relevant disciplines to the table, discuss and provide evidence-based and actionable research results for use by the policy makers. This is evident first from the participants at this meeting coming from diverse disciplinary backgrounds and the theme and focus of the conference, which is **“Agricultural Growth, Poverty Reduction and Millennium Development Goals in Africa”**. The meeting brings together over 250 members from public, private non governmental organizations, research and development institutions as well as development partners in Africa and the rest of the world. Over 50 countries are represented.

The objective of the conference is to bring together agricultural economists and other related professionals throughout the continent and other parts of the world interested in Africa to share experiences in research and development to promote understanding on possible ways of achieving the MDGs in Africa. Specifically, we intent to improve liaison between agricultural economists at the regional and international levels; promote training, research, policy dialogue in the profession on the continent; and, to contribute to broad based rural development, poverty reduction, food security and sustainable use of natural recourses in Africa. The presentations and discussions will cover six sub themes:

- Advancing technical change in African Agriculture
- Expanding the frontier of Agricultural Economists to meet the challenges of development
- The role of Agriculture in Poverty Reduction
- Meeting Africa's food and nutrition challenges
- Improved markets for African farmers for poverty reduction
- Agriculture, environment and sustainable development

We also have organized panels on Conflict Management and Food Security in Africa as well as Presentations and discussions on Regional and International Initiatives in Africa. You will probably agree with me that the sub-themes and panels represent the breadth of agricultural development issues and cover the essential features of what we need to be concerned about to achieve the MDGs. The depth will be evidenced by the actual presentations and discussions in the next three days of the conference, to which you are warmly welcome to participate in. This will be kicked off by the key note speaker by one of the continent's most eminent scholars and achievers, Dr. Monty Jones, the World Food Prize laureate, and Executive Secretary of FARA. We are deeply honored to have him give the key note address. We would like to thank all those who have actively participated to make the conference reach this far. There would be no conference without the paper contributions. Therefore those who submitted abstracts, developed papers and are actually going to present are gratefully acknowledged. All submitted abstracts were rigorously reviewed and ranked by an international panel of distinguished scientists. We thank the reviewers. At the same time, I am grateful to those who have offered to undertake various roles at these meeting. The presentations will give all of us the opportunity for learning, discussing and interacting. Several participants will present posters and exhibits to enhance interaction and exchange of information and ideas. The conference Compact Disc (CDs) will be available for distribution to all participants and research and development institutions. I urge all participants to take advantage of the time at the meeting. I am confident that the AAAE meeting will present you with the opportunity to be inspired to support it to grow in a sustainable way and achieve its noble objectives. The conference should also enable you to expand your network of colleagues. Once again, welcome and enjoy the conference.