



Dr. Kerry J. Byrnes retired in 2014 after a 40+ year career working to address challenges to agricultural and rural development in the world's developing countries. He was born on September 11, 1945, in Dayton, Ohio, to Ethel Belle Overholt and Francis Clair Byrnes. At the time Francis was in the Army-Air Force. In 1948 the family moved to Worthington, where Francis worked in agricultural journalism and agricultural extension with The Ohio State University. Kerry attended 1st-3rd grade in Worthington at St. Michael's Elementary School. In 1953 the family moved to a new home near East Lansing, Michigan, where Francis began working as the Associate Director of the National Agricultural Communication Project at Michigan State University, where he also earned a Ph.D. in Communication.

Kerry continued grade school from 3rd - 8th grade in East Lansing at St. Thomas Aquinas Elementary School, was in the Cub Scouts, served as an altar boy at Mass, and completed grade school in 1959. He attended Okemos High School from 9th-12th grade, along the way participating in track and earning a letter in cross country. Before graduating, he received the Eagle Scout Award (Troop 293), becoming the Troop's first Eagle Scout. On graduating from high school in 1963, he earned two degrees at Michigan State University (MSU) - a B.A. in Sociology (1967) and an M.A. in Communication (1968), and later a Ph.D. in Sociology with an Economics minor from Iowa State University (1975). While an undergraduate at Michigan State, Kerry took course work in Toluca, Mexico at the Autonomous University of the State of Mexico (summer, 1964), and similarly took courses at the University of the Philippines - College of Agriculture in Los Baños, Philippines for a semester in 1966.

Kerry retired from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in September 2014 as a Foreign Service Officer-Limited (Agriculture Development Officer) in the Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). His affinity for the LAC region derived from having studied Spanish for three years in high school and took second year Spanish as a freshman at MSU. Then, in the summer of 1964, Kerry lived with a Mexican family in Toluca (Mexico) while studying at the Autonomous University of the State of Mexico. Later he worked a year (1968-69) in Cali, Colombia on a USAID-funded project, where he met and married Sonia Gomez Naranjo in August 1969, practicing Spanish with Sonia daily throughout their 50+ years of marriage.

Byrnes' first exposure to international agricultural and rural development came in March of 1963, when his parents moved the family to the Philippines, where Kerry's father (Francis) had been employed by the Rockefeller Foundation to serve as head of communication, training and information services at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in Los Baños. In early fall of 1963, Kerry returned to the U.S. to begin his freshmen year at MSU. The opportunity to travel to the Philippines provided first-hand opportunity to observe the challenges of third-world farming and rural life, which planted a seed for a professional career working with development organizations such as USAID to address the challenges to agricultural and rural development in the developing countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Throughout his career working in support of USAID assistance to the developing countries, Kerry acquired knowledge/expertise/experience that translated into contributions to various development initiatives funded by USAID and other donors (e.g., World Bank and IADB) and development assistance organizations (e.g., FAO and IICA) that provided funding or technical support for development projects in agricultural marketing; fertilizer marketing and use; workshop/training development, delivery, and evaluation; agricultural research, extension, and education; farming systems research and extension; management communication for development; development and delivery of workshops on institutional strengthening of NGOs; trade capacity building; trade-led agricultural diversification; and food security and food safety.

On completing his M.A. degree at Michigan State in 1968, Kerry moved to Cali, Colombia, where he worked for nearly a year with Michigan State on the USAID-funded Integrated Rural-Urban Marketing Project (PIMUR) study of agricultural marketing in Colombia's Cauca Valley. He collaborated with project colleagues on their studies and lead a sub-study on the role of market information and communication media in the Valley's agricultural marketing system. In the fall of 1969, Kerry returned from Colombia to the U.S. to begin a doctoral program in Sociology at Iowa State on a research assistantship that focused on a civil defense research project. Kerry's initial time in Ames was interrupted in the spring of 1970 when, in response to draft order from the Selective Service System, he applied for Conscientious Objector status which later was granted on September 10, 1970. The next day, September 11

(Kerry's birthday), he visited the Selective Service office in Lansing, Michigan to pick up his new draft card that indicated his classification as Conscientious Objector. As he often recalled; "...best birthday card I ever received!"

By that time, Kerry and Sonia had already applied in the spring of 1970 to serve as VISTA Volunteers and were accepted and assigned to serve as Volunteers in a low-income community in the Edison Little River area of Miami, FL. Kerry worked as a teacher's aide in a local primary school's Head Start Program, while Sonia served as interpreter for the school's social worker during home visits. In the evenings, they both taught English classes for Spanish- and Creole-speaking community residents.

On leaving VISTA and returning to Iowa State in the spring of 1972, Kerry resumed his doctoral studies, working as a research assistant on the USAID-funded Indicators of Social Development Project, writing or contributing to project reports on social indicators for the health sector and social indicators in the small farmer agricultural sector. For his doctoral dissertation, Kerry analyzed the implementation of the Rockefeller Foundation-funded Puebla Project in Mexico as providing an empirical case for the testing of a social action model Kerry adapted from an existing social action model. That adaptation became the title of Kerry's dissertation: *A Construct of Social Action for Small Farmer Agricultural Development.*

In the spring of 1975, near the end of his doctoral program, Kerry landed a position as Sociologist in the Agro-Economic Division of the International Fertilizer Development Center (IFDC) in Muscle Shoals, AL, later transferring to the Outreach Division. Kerry's time at IFDC was split between work at headquarters and short-term assignments to developing countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Initially, in the Agro-Economic Division, Kerry conducted a major review of factors influencing farmer adoption and use of fertilizer, along the way providing input to the design of a field-based fertilizer adoption and use study in Bangladesh, as well as to the design of fertilizer use studies in Indonesia and Mali. Kerry's helped edit IFDC's proposal to the United Nations Development Programme for a multi-year grant for providing training on fertilizer production, marketing, and use. Kerry's assistance helped IFDC land that grant, after which the Center's Outreach Division invited Kerry to join that division. There he provided technical support to design, implement, and evaluate UNDP-funded fertilizer use and fertilizer marketing training programs at IFDC headquarters and in several countries of Africa (Kenya and Nigeria) and Asia (Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Thailand).

On leaving IFDC in late 1984, Kerry took a job with the USDA-Graduate School in Washington D.C. on a USAID-funded project on which he worked nearly a year, researching and writing a concept paper and developing a project prospectus outlining the case for the U.S. Congress to fund USAID to carry out a research and action project to tap the potential of farmer organizations to be more effective drivers for agricultural and rural development. However, USAID decided not to request funding for that project and, less than a year on the job, USAID cancelled the employment mechanism under which Kerry and several others had been hired. As a result, Kerry suddenly found himself looking for short-term consulting assignments until a new full-time job could be landed.

During this period (1985-1987), Kerry carried out many short-term assignments in various LAC countries under contract with several consulting firms, including: Academy for Educational Development (AED), Agricultural Cooperative Development International (ACDI), Associates in Rural Development (ARD), Chemonics International (CI), Management Training and Development Institute (MTDI), Ronco Consulting, and Winrock International. Also, in 1987, while consulting for the World Bank, Kerry conducted a field-based study in three provinces of Pakistan, to assess the Bank's experience in establishing water user associations to support brick-lining and maintenance of watercourses under bank-funded irrigation projects, with his report being published by the World Bank.

In late 1987, Kerry began a new job, working with USAID's Center for Development Information and Evaluation (under two successive contracts with small business firms). In this position, he conducted a study on USAID's support for Farming Systems Research and Extension (FSR/E) projects in Africa, Asia, and Latin America; produced project case studies and a cross-cutting analysis of USAID experiences in funding and partner experiences in implementing FSR/E projects. Kerry also conducted a study in Central America on how entrepreneurial farmers and firms learned to grow and export melons as a non-traditional agricultural export crop. He also worked on several smaller (i.e. shorter-term) studies to assess or evaluate USAID experience or projects in Bolivia on health and in the Eastern Caribbean on export development.

In the fall of 1989, Chemonics International (CI) invited Kerry to join the USAID-funded LAC Agriculture and Rural Development Technical Services (LAC TECH) project, on which he served until mid-1993 as the Agricultural, Research, and Extension Advisor. Initially, he led a team that conducted a Congressionally-mandated “joint agricultural research and extension feasibility study” in the Caribbean. He also carried out an in-depth review of 40 years of USAID support for agricultural research, extension, and extension projects in the LAC region, while also providing field-based technical support to USAID Missions in the LAC region. Several assignments led to collaborating with CI administrative staff to develop and deliver an Organizational Management for Sustainability (OMS) workshop that Kerry and colleagues subsequently conducted for NGOs in many LAC countries. These workshops built on Kerry’s experience working with MTDI on the Management Communication for Development workshops.

In mid-1993, Kerry shifted to a new, but similar, position under a USAID contract with USDA’s Foreign Agricultural Service/Office of International Cooperation and Development [OICD - later renamed the Office of Capacity Building and Development (OCBD)]. Kerry worked in that position nearly 20 years, providing technical advisory services to USAID LAC Missions and USAID’s Broad Based Economic Growth Team in LAC’s Office of Regional Sustainable Development. The job also entailed providing technical advisory support to other USAID bureaus such as the Bureau for Economic Growth, Agriculture and Trade (EGAT), and later the Bureau for Food Security (BFS). During this period, Kerry provided technical support to assist in getting two USDA projects designed and funded to help Central American countries respond to Hurricane Mitch. One of these projects helped countries to address their sanitary and phytosanitary obligations under the World Trade Organization SPS Agreement, and the other project helped these countries to better anticipate food shortages by improving data collection, analysis, and monitoring of country-level agricultural production trends.

During the period that the U.S. Government was negotiating free trade agreements with nearly all or some of the LAC countries, Kerry, collaborating with the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, represented USAID equities during negotiation of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA - which negotiations stalled in 2004). Kerry was involved with the subsequent negotiation of a Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR – including the Dominican Republic); and finally the negotiation of free trade agreements with Colombia and Peru under the proposed Andean Trade Promotion Agreement (ATPA). In the latter two negotiations, Kerry represented USAID in the Trade Capacity Building Working Group that met during each negotiation rounds (FTAA and ATPA).

Responding to a request of USAID’s Assistant Administrator for the LAC region, Kerry became Editor-in-Chief of the *LAC Trade Matters* newsletter that was distributed electronically to USAID, the LAC Missions, other USG agencies (State, USTR, and USDA), and a broad audience of individuals and organization interested in “trade capacity building.” Over several years, Kerry produced a total of 60 issues of that newsletter. He also collaborated with USAID/EGAT to design and deliver trade capacity building orientation workshops for USAID Mission-level staff, initially in Guatemala for Central America and later in Peru for the Andean Region. During this period, Kerry also provided technical and administrative support to the development and oversight of trade-related technical assistance projects funded by USAID and implemented by various USG agencies, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture (helping countries to comply with their obligations under the WTO Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures), the Federal Trade Commission (helping countries to strengthen their institutional capacities in competition policy analysis and/or enforcement) and the U.S. Customs Service (helping countries to upgrade their customs procedures).

From 2008-2014, in response to the food price hikes during 2008, Kerry worked closely with USAID, USDA, and Department of State counterparts to help ensure that LAC country food security challenges and USAID Mission equities in the LAC region were factored into design, launch, and implementation of the USG Feed the Future (FTF) initiative to improve food security in the developing countries. Within the LAC region FTF’s geographic focus was Central America (Guatemala and Honduras) and Haiti. Work on this front entailed coordination with the USAID LAC Missions to keep them apprised of how the FTF initiative was evolving and helping Missions respond to USG and USAID (Bureau for Food Security) requests for information that only the Missions were in a position to provide.

In 2012, USAID’s LAC Bureau continued Kerry’s service to the Bureau by offering him the opportunity to become a USAID direct hire under the Agency’s Foreign Service Officer-Limited hiring authority. Kerry worked in that position

for two years, continuing to provide leadership and technical advisory support services to LAC's Broad Based Economic Growth team, USAID Missions in the LAC region, and the Bureau for Food Security on the FTF Initiative. During those two years, Kerry represented LAC Bureau and Mission equities during implementation of FTF to deliver technical assistance to FTF-assisted countries through USAID's bilateral programs in Guatemala, Honduras, and Haiti, and the Central America regional program managed by USAID/El Salvador's ECAM Office.

During this same period, Kerry also provided technical support to the design of and CTO oversight to several USAID-funded initiatives, including a study (conducted by UC-Davis) on constraints to growth of the Central American horticultural sector and a Federal Trade Commission-conducted study on barriers to competition in Central American food markets. He also worked with the Food and Drug Administration and the USDA to design the Food Safety and Agricultural Sustainability Training Program (FAST) that was implemented by USDA throughout the LAC region to assist LAC countries to prepare for exporting food-related produce and products in compliance with the U.S. Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA).

Over the 25-year (1989-2014) period of working with USAID's LAC Bureau, Kerry carried out over 100 short-term assignments to support USAID assistance in 21 countries of the LAC region. Going back into the late 1960s (including the years he worked with IFDC from 1975-1984), Kerry carried out a total of 170 short-term assignments in a total of 39 countries of the developing world. While working with USAID in the LAC region, his short-term assignments varied, but overtime included doing studies/assessments, writing scopes of work, evaluating projects, assisting Missions with strategy development, conducting training courses on organizational management for sustainability, participating in trade capacity building working groups during free trade agreement negotiation rounds; and representing the LAC Bureau in USAID regional meetings as well as meetings sponsored by the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank. Kerry's autobiographical memoir – [*On Assignment with Kerry: Memorable Moments from 40+ Years of Travel to the Developing World*](#) – provides briefs on the work-related focus of Kerry's travels in the developing world.

On retiring from USAID at the end of September 2014, USAID Administrator honored Kerry with the Agency's Outstanding Career Achievement Award, with this citation: "for a career marked by exemplary contributions in the fields of agricultural development and trade capacity building in Latin America and the Caribbean." After retiring, Kerry received two honors – in 2018, the Distinguished Alumni Award from the Okemos Education Foundation; and in 2020, the Outstanding Alumni Award from Michigan State University's College of Communication Arts and Sciences. Shortly following retirement, Kerry authored [*Some Post-Retirement Reflections on USAID Development Assistance to the LAC Region*](#)¹. All of his professional papers and reports were donated to and are available from the [Agricultural Communication Documentation Center](#) at the University of Illinois.

After retiring, Kerry turned his research and writing talents to topics of more personal, and sometimes more autobiographical, interests. His writings (all of which can be read online (or downloaded) from the website of the Okemos Alumni Association (www.okemosalumni.org) include:

- [*Giants in Their Realms: Close Encounters with the Celebrity Kind*](#),
- [*On Assignment with Kerry: Memorable Moments from 40+ Years of Travel to the Developing World*](#),
- [*Hooked on Gigabytes: Confessions of a Gadget Junkie*](#),
- [*From Okemos High's O-ZONE to Michigan State's IZ-ZONE: The Red Cedar Journeys of The Chieftain Fourteen*](#), and
- [*Diving Deep, Deep Down: Scoring the Fathoms of the Soundtrack Zone*](#).

Besides these writing projects, Kerry also split his retirement time between international travel with Sonia; following grandson Braden's sports career (especially in basketball), and following the Michigan State Spartans' football and basketball teams (oftentimes critiquing games, seasons and recruitment prospects with his Spartan brother, Kevin). Many of these writings were developed as he listened to his large music collection (consisting primarily of film scores, exotica, folk, and new age) accumulated through on-line purchases, trades with other collectors and countless hours sifting through retail CD racks. Encouraged by Sonia to "down-size" his collection, in 2018 Kerry donated his

¹ Available at Academia.edu

collection of 2000+ film soundtrack CDs to the Michigan State University Library for the enrichment of MSU music and theatrical arts students.

Kerry is survived by his wife Sonia (Reston, VA), his brother (Kevin F. Byrnes, Henrico, VA), his sister (Kathryn A. (Byrnes) Stephens, New Bern, NC), his son (Shannon A. Byrnes, Herndon, VA), and his grandson (Braden E. Byrnes, Herndon, VA), his daughter-in-law (D. Jeannine (Long) Byrnes, Herndon, VA), his sister-in-law (Joan M. (Malesich) Byrnes, Henrico, VA) and brother-in-law (James F. Stephens, New Bern, NC).