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Milken Institute, Motsepe Foundation announce winners of the Milken-Motsepe Prize in Agritech

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The Milken Institute and the Motsepe Foundation announced the winners of the Milken-Motsepe Prize in AgriTech, the first of a series of multiyear, multimillion-dollar innovation competitions and programs to advance technological progress toward the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The prizes were awarded at the Milken Institute Global Conference in Los Angeles, California.

NovFeed, a biotech company based in Tanzania, was awarded the $1 million grand prize for its proprietary technology to upcycle organic waste into nutritious, sustainable and traceable plant-based protein ingredients and concentrated natural biofertilisers for the food system.

The $300,000 award for second place was presented to Karpolax, an Uganda-based company, for its nanotechnology solution that helps fruits and vegetables stay fresh longer without losing nutritional value. The $150,000 award for third place was presented to IRRI-AfricaRice for its biotech innovation to help rice farmers protect their crops from flooding, one of the most damaging effects of climate change.

Bonus prizes of $100,000 each were also announced. Kuronga, based in South Africa, took the bonus prize for the most creative use of Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies for its machine learning and machine vision mobile app, using AI to connect farmers with buyers and making it easier to validate the quality of crops. COOL LION, a CÃ´te d'Ivoire-based startup that provides cooling-as-a-service solutions for different industries (agriculture, fisheries, etc.) and powered by renewable energy, took home the Peopleâ??s Choice bonus prize for the most transformative idea according to the public.

â??Varied solutions were considered during the competition, and this contributes to current and future efforts to understand and resolve challenges facing agriculture,â? said Dr Precious Moloi-Motsepe, co-founder and CEO of the Motsepe Foundation. â??Making progress towards the SDGs is crucial. We are truly impressed by the participantsâ?? ideas and thank each of them for their dedication to finding viable and scalable solutions.â?

â??The winners exemplify the fact that bold, scalable, transformative ideas can come from anywhere,â? said Dr Emily Musil Church, senior director at the Milken Institute Centre for Strategic Philanthropy. â??Bringing talent to the fore and supporting entrepreneurs is an intentional goal of the competition. It doesn't end there. The expanded network of investors and stakeholders built into the program offers the winning teams continued opportunities to innovate and thrive."

After launching the competition in April 2021, more than 3,300 people from 105 countries across six continents registered for the Milken-Motsepe Prize in AgriTech. An independent panel of expert judges carefully selected 25 finalist teams to receive $10,000 to develop and test their innovations to improve economic value for small and medium-sized farms in Africa. Each of the teams took part in a rigorous, independent judging process, which assessed their innovationâ??s potential to increase farm productivity and/or decrease post-harvest loss.

Teams also received a variety of special benefits, including participation in a tuition-free, experiential learning program offered by Global Innovation Catalyst in collaboration with Stanford Online, where they received mentoring from industry experts, pitch coaching, and feedback sessions.

The Milken-Motsepe Innovation Prize Program has continued to grow, launching a second competition, the Milken-Motsepe Prize in Green Energy in November 2022. The Prize in Green Energy is a $2 million innovation competition to reward entrepreneurs and innovators who expand access to reliable, affordable, and sustainable electricity in Africa.