

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **WATG helps fund Innovative Program Aimed at Assisting Ethiopian Agriculture** **Donation to SDSU's Zahn Innovation Center supports development for unique teff thresher equipment**

**Irvine, August 2015** - As an award-winning, visionary design firm, [WATG](#) has enjoyed great success over the years in creating internationally acclaimed destinations. With a track record of "designing experiences that lift the spirit" now spanning 70 years and 160 countries, WATG strives to design destinations that reflect both the environmental beauty and culture within each locale. Part of the firm's commitment to both the environment and local cultures includes contributing to selective socially responsible programs.

A recent example of this can be seen in the firm's donation of \$2,500 to San Diego State University's Zahn Innovation Center, which is spearheading funding to assist 6.5 million impoverished farmers in Ethiopia. WATG's donation alone represented 50% of the total fund raising goal. Along with additional contributions from both individuals and other business organizations, the Zahn Innovation Center, and its affiliated crowd-funding website, [Strive](#), are championing an effort to help Ethiopian farmers in their struggle to grow a nutrition-rich grain known as teff. The constant struggle and challenges these farmers have endured is primarily due to the fact there has been no access to modern, inventive technology that enables efficient harvesting of this grain- until now. Thanks to the innovative and tireless efforts of several SDSU engineering and business students, a low-cost, human-powered teff thresher has been developed, providing a much-needed dose of modern technology to what historically has been a very arduous and time-consuming process. What's more, the teff thresher presents a highly desired sustainable, scalable, for-profit business model that can dramatically improve farming practices, and help spur economic growth for many agriculture-based communities.

According to WATG President and Chief Executive Officer Mike Seyle, who earned his MBA from SDSU, supporting the Zahn Innovation Center offered a unique and timely opportunity for the firm to "give back" to those less fortunate and deserving. "As in many developing countries, there is a large segment of the farming community in Ethiopia that continues to struggle. As a company that has been privileged to design so many inspiring destinations, including several in Africa and the Middle East, we felt both compelled and proud to contribute to this worthwhile program. The innovative spirit exhibited by the SDSU engineering and business students echoes, to a large degree, what WATG strives for in our design work for our clients."

Teff is Ethiopia's most significant crop by area planted and value of production, and the second largest cash crop (after coffee) in Ethiopia, generating almost 500 million USD in income per year for local farmers. The thresher developed by the SDSU team is human-powered, thus avoiding the need for a multitude of additional moving parts and fuel, which an engine-powered machine requires. The teff thresher is both affordable and simple to operate, and transforms difficult, unsanitary, and inefficient teff harvesting into an efficient and manageable task. Operation of the thresher involves two people: One person at the rear of the thresher feeds

teff grain into the thresher while the second person propels the thresher by pedaling a bike. The resulting power from the bike turns the thresher, which then harvests the seeds for additional crops. The team at SDSU successfully field-tested the first prototype in Ethiopia while simultaneously completing a second prototype to reduce production costs and increase output. A third prototype, now in the design phase, is expected to improve the thresher even more.

The fund raising effort was administered through *Strive*, the university's crowd-funding website, which provides an opportunity for SDSU students, staff, and faculty to fulfill fundraising initiatives. The Strive team promotes each initiative to alumni and friends of the university via social networks and targeted email messages. These communications provide opportunities for potential donors to invest in projects they are passionate about, and allows them to support areas of greatest need. Overall, the fund raising initiative proved to be extremely successful, and will no doubt help to fund future refinements of the teff thresher for a farming community that is in desperate need of assistance.

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### **About WATG**

WATG is celebrating 70 years of design excellence in 2015. Over the course of the last seven decades, WATG and affiliated design studio Wimberly Interiors have become the world's leading design consultants in the industry. With offices in Irvine, Los Angeles, New York, London, Istanbul, Dubai, Singapore, and Honolulu, the full-service design firm is best known for creating internationally acclaimed destinations in 160 countries across six continents. WATG offers design services comprising strategy, planning, architecture, urban design, landscape, and interior design for urban, tourism and resort destinations. WATG's projects are renowned not only for their design and sense of place but also for their bottom-line success. Explore more at [watg.com](http://watg.com)

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