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Bill Gate donates to Winnipeg charity

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By Kevin Rollason

A Winnipeg-based charity helping poor farmers in India has a rich benefactor -- computer software billionaire Bill Gates.

Gates announced on Friday his Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation will give International Development Enterprises a grant of \$27 million over four years to help its micro-irrigation program for small Indian farmers.

The grant follows last year's announcement from the foundation that it would give IDE \$13.4 million over four years for projects to help farmers in African and Asian countries, including Ethiopia, Zambia, and Nepal.

"This is the biggest grant we have ever had -- and last year's was the biggest we had at that time," IDE executive director Stuart Taylor said Friday.

"This is just excellent," said Al Doerksen, who is IDE's Indian project manager.

"There's a great need in India, but this is a fantastic time to achieve success with the way the Indian economy is going, increasing nine per cent a year."

The latest grant from the Gates Foundation will help IDE install 160,000 foot-powered water pumps, known as treadle pumps, and 90,000 drip irrigation systems.

Taylor said the size and price of the drip irrigation systems means farmers who earn only \$1 a day can afford them for their small plots of land.

IDE, which was founded in Winnipeg 26 years ago, predicts its project will generate \$12 in income for farmers for every \$1 from the grant, or more than \$300 million.

The grant was part of a total of \$306 million in grants announced by Gates on Friday during a press conference in Davos, Switzerland.

Gates said in a statement "if we are serious about ending extreme hunger and poverty around the world, we must be serious about transforming agriculture for small farmers -- most of whom are women."

The foundation's total grants are designed to help up to 250,000 small farm families in 14 states in India.

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