

STARFYSH NEWS

NEWS FROM STARFYSH.ORG

MAY 2017

STARFYSH IS WORKING TO BRING HOLISTIC, SUSTAINABLE TRANSFORMATION TO THE ISLAND OF LA GONAVE, HAITI



ISLAND AGRICULTURE

The Winter dry season is over and we are excited to see Spring rains bringing life to Life Garden's moringa groves. It doesn't take long for the orchard to green up! It won't be long before this year's moringa harvest is in full swing. We are very excited about the gains we are making in the area of island agriculture:

Life Garden: WISH Campus

It did not take long to completely fill our first 20' x 50' shade structure with thousands of young tree seedlings. Busting at the seams, we'll soon be erecting our second shade structure. It is rewarding to think about not only the great nutritional impact these trees will have on the lives of people here, but the tremendous ecological impact these trees will have on the island. Very literally, La Gonave will be a cooler place to live as a result of the tree seedlings nurtured in our Life Garden nurseries.

Life Garden: Mountain Campus

The most critical first step need in getting our new mountain campus up and running is a source of water. NEED MET! Starfysh recently received a gift designated specifically to drill a well at our new Life Garden site.

Documentary: "The Message of Moringa"

A recent and exciting project development is the production of a documentary about the benefits of moringa (AKA "the miracle tree"), a tree whose leaves are, ounce-for-ounce, one of the most nutritious plant sources in the world AND a tree that grows well in Haiti's distressed soil.

"The Message of Moringa" will be a Creole-language production filmed here on La Gonave, but we believe it will have a nationwide impact. We have already received strong support from folks in the Haiti news media and they have assured us that they will actively help us get "The Message of Moringa" out to the entire country. For more information on this project, visit our website (starfysh.org/our-work/agriculture-projects).

Biochar Study

Another exciting initiative Starfysh has just begun is a project to study the agricultural and economic impact of integrating biochar into the soils of gardens and farms here on the island and the potential that might exist for producing biochar right here on the island, biochar for local use and for possible export to Haiti's mainland. We are excited that American Biochar Company will be partnering with Starfysh to see if biochar fortification of La Gonave's tired topsoil might, in fact, be an important solution in seeing agriculture make a comeback here in Haiti, once one of the top agricultural producers in the world. For more information on biochar and this project initiative, visit our website (starfysh.org/our-work/agriculture-projects).



(Above, left) Starfysh Ag Director, Paul Donn, travels to the villages to introduce the merits of moringa. Paul Donn will be a key voice in our documentary, "The Message of Moringa," which we'll be able to get out to every village in Haiti.



(Above, center) Chaya is another great nutritional source, though, unlike moringa, it needs to be cooked. Chaya trees will grow here and we are propagating hundreds of them in our nurseries for eventual distribution.



Thousands of moringa tree seedlings are being propagated in our Life Garden nurseries.



CLEAN WATER

A team from Lowell Michigan Rotary Club returned to the island in March to install more bio-sand filters in a village whose water source is unclean. As a result of their work, 59 more families no longer have to be afraid their water will make them sick. We are thankful that Rotary, with their vision for a world without unclean water, has embraced our vision that La Gonave, Haiti will one day be a place where everyone's water is safe to drink.

To make things even better, filters were installed in yet another 91 homes on the island since Lowell Rotary's recent visit. Since our beginnings, well over 1,000 families on the island are drinking clean water as a result of Starfysh's bio-sand filter initiative. We are so pleased that, so far, six villages are healthier as a result of having 100% of their homes drinking clean water from our filters.

As happy as we are for our progress, we must not stop now. Water-borne illnesses (e.g., viral, typhoid, cholera, parasitic, etc.) are still common here (the second leading cause of illness in Haiti!). We estimate that there are between 10-12,000 homes on La Gonave, spread across dozens of seaside and mountain villages. We look forward to the day every one of these homes has clean water to drink and when La Gonave boasts the lowest waterborne illness rate in Haiti.



GLOBAL LEARNING



One of the frequent by-products of our work here in Haiti happens when the minds and hearts of people back here at home are touched by it in some way. Here are some recent examples:

One such example occurred when Penny B, a teacher at Ada Elementary School (Ada, Michigan) returned to her classroom after coming down with one of our teacher training teams. Her life forever impacted, Penny's overflowing heart could not help but share her experiences with her second graders and fellow teachers. The result has been that the students at Ada Elementary have developed an ongoing dialogue with students of the schools here on La Gonave. Recently, Penny and her Haitian teacher counterparts organized a "Kite Day," where kids of both schools made kites from scratch, personalizing them with messages of kindness and goodwill toward each other.

Another example of the impact a teacher can make on and through his students is 4th-grade teacher, Joe A, at Cherry Creek Elementary (Lowell, Michigan) where Joe engaged the students in his classroom and school to collect money to purchase 18 bio-sand filters for people here on the island vulnerable to water-borne disease.

Yet another instance of global impact coming out of the classroom: students of Rather Elementary (Ionia, Michigan) recently collected enough in donations to provide two families with filters. Point proven... you don't have to be old to make a significant difference.

Kulfans Move To The Mainland



It is with sadness that Starfysh says goodbye to Bruce and Amy Kulfan and their girls, Brianna and Riley, who have been called to work at HERO, an ambulance service based in Port-au-Prince. HERO falls right into their wheelhouses, Bruce as an experienced EMT, Amy with her office administration skills. We are thankful for the service the Kulfans have given to Starfysh and wish them great success and fulfillment in this next phase of their faith journey.

VEHICLES

Mountain terrain, intense heat, and salt air are a brutal combination that wreak a slow havoc on our vehicle engines and tires, which is why we are so thankful for the recent donation of engine diagnostic equipment (thank you, Walt!) followed up by a visit by auto mechanic, Shane, who took a week out of his schedule to come down with his wife, Ginger, to invest his time and talents in getting our vehicles back up and running. So thanks Walt, Shane, Ginger! More proof that serving the poor looks and works best when people come together to do it.



DENTISTS RETURN

Starfysh recently enjoyed hosting Dr. Dan Gordon's dental team who returned for their sixth visit from Holland, Michigan to treat people in the mountains who have never before seen a dentist. We are thankful to Dr. Gordon. Hundreds of people have benefited from his teams over the years. Plus, his regular visits have served to establish a great working model for future visiting dental teams who will come down to treat people in distant villages. Groundwork with village leadership previously laid, the team sets up the clinic in the village church, typically on Sunday afternoon. Suction and drilling equipment, lights and sterilizers, dental hygiene units, and the electrical wiring and gasoline generators to run it all. On Monday morning, then, the one-week clinics begin as villagers filter in from the surrounding countryside, some with painful abscesses they've had to live with for years. A remarkable sight... God's love being demonstrated in such practical terms.



DEAR FRIENDS,



The longer I live the more I realize not only how little I knew “back then” but how much I have yet to learn. I thought my learning curve would level out by this decade of my life. I am either a very slow learner or there is much yet to be known. Likely a combination of both. I have come to know that the secret to persevering and not burning out or becoming irrelevant, is to live a life of ongoing teachability. It keeps us humble. It keeps us amazed. It’s true for people and organizations, for families and businesses. And it is true for this movement called Starfysh.

It is a movement because it moves. It lives and breathes and changes shape. Setting out to bless others, it has blessed us. Our vision to transform an island is, in the process, transforming you and me.

I entered the fray thinking it was all about them. About poor people and sick people and malnourished people and spiritually empty people. But I have learned that working among the poor has served to expose my own poverties, too. And that, in fact, it isn’t just about them. It’s about me, too, and the important development work God is doing in my own heart and life.

One of the things I have come to know is that all of our kindnesses and good deeds, in all their forms, make a difference beyond the obvious. The good feeling we have about helping the helpless is a God-placed feeling, His assurance that we have pleased Him also. A yanked abscessed tooth may seem a small thing, but for the woman who sat in the dentist chair it’s anything but small. She can now live her life without constant headache and pain. The trees we plant don’t just provide fruit for families, they’ll cool the climate, invite the rains, and protect the topsoil for decades to come. Grade schoolers attending our little mountain schools not only learn a basic education, but they learn that the world is full of kids who, like them, have aspirations and like to fly kites. And not only have we improved the health and life expectancies of families receiving our water filters, our visits to and prayers over their homes have raised those families’ sense of dignity and worth and have let them know that they are not invisible. We see them. God sees them.

As you pray for and give toward our work, please know that your prayers and donations go a lot farther than you think, and that we are making a monster difference in the lives of people and in the life of an island called La Gonave. In a world of contentiousness and instability and hate, I hope you will join me in going on the offensive, fighting evil by exemplifying good and not just talking about it. There are times for debate, but we all know most debates are not convincingly won. Let the world take notice that if evil can be overcome by good in an unlikely place like La Gonave, evil can be overcome by good anywhere.

Thanks for your generous giving and prayers.

Steve Edmondson

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If you haven’t been to our website lately, we hope you will soon! Updated, reformatted, and now mobile-friendly, our site is poised to grow with us as we move forward in our work.



6757 Cascade Rd. SE #207
Grand Rapids, MI 49546
starfysh.org

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