

# STARFYSH NEWS

NEWS FROM STARFYSH.ORG

SUMMER 2019

STARFYSH IS WORKING TO BRING HOLISTIC, SUSTAINABLE TRANSFORMATION

TO THE ISLAND OF LA GONAVE, HAITI



## Political Instability and Civil Unrest

For over one year now, the political and socio-economic situation in Haiti has steadily deteriorated, with things getting so serious this past February that the US State Department issued a Level Four (“Do Not Travel”) advisory to those planning travel to Haiti. Country-wide demonstrations, road-closures, fuel shortages, gang-violence, looting, car burning, and shootings paralyzed the mainland, making travel about the country dangerous if not impossible. The strength of the Haitian dollar plummeted. Many relief agencies with expatriate workers in the country brought their staff home.

Those living on the island of La Gonave, though not caught in the middle of the disturbances on the mainland, have, however, been feeling the impact very significantly. Food is in short supply and expensive, so the problem of daily hunger and subsequent malnutrition has been even worse. “Haiti is facing a large-scale food emergency, with 37% of the rural population in need of humanitarian food assistance” (reliefweb.int). It’s not surprising that discouragement and worry characterize the mood of La Gonavians. It has been sad to witness.

Starfysh has also felt the impact. The way we are able to pay for the guesthouse lease (\$9,000/year) is through the many teams that visit each year (shown above). With the absence of visiting guests and teams, we are struggling with where to find the funds to pay the landlord. Additionally, we have two container shipments on hold here in Michigan because the government office that issues our franchise number (normally a very simple process) has been closed during the unrest. We are thankful, that in the midst of the trouble, our work has continued on without interruption because it is 100% the work of those who live there on the island.

This past June the UN Security Counsel approved a resolution to create a UN “Integrated Office” in Haiti, designed to support Haiti’s government in strengthening political stability and good governance. On October 16th, the Office, named BINUH, will replace the 15-year long peacekeeping presence in the country. Please pray with us that things will stabilize.

# DEAR FRIENDS,



There is no place on earth like La Gonave. Most every well-traveled development worker who visits the island tells us that conditions here are as hard as any they've seen anywhere else they've been in the world. Harsh conditions have ganged up on the people who call La Gonave home and it's not their fault. Remoteness. Harsh climate. Lack of basic infrastructure (roads, electricity). The island of La Gonave, though a part of Haiti and influenced by Haiti's systemic problems, is like its own small country in a way, sitting out there in the sea. Throw in the specter of the yearly "hurricane season" that everyone here knows could, if it capriciously wanted to, sweep away life and property in one heartless storm.

Most people are startled when they learn that much of the food for sale in the streets and markets of La Gonave is purchased on Haiti's mainland, brought to the island by boat, and then re-sold at higher price to the people of the island. (Equally startling is the fact that the entire country of Haiti, once a wealthy colony and a major exporter of food to the world, itself now imports a majority of the food its people consumes!). A sad irony. Add to this the falling value of the Haitian currency and you have the ingredients for a gradual nationwide humanitarian crisis of hunger, malnutrition, and disease.

One response option might be to send food. A compassionate and simple, though knee-jerk response. People are hungry today; they need to eat today, we reason. Problem is, not only is sending food not a long-term solution to the hunger problem, sending food, though well-intentioned, only serves to suppress an already struggling Haitian agricultural economy. Containers of rice arriving from other countries after hurricanes and earthquakes serve only to put thousands of Haitian rice growers and workers, who cannot compete with free rice, out of business.

The other more considered, long-range approach would be to, pre-catastrophically, help families get back on their agricultural feet. This is Starfysh's model. Our vision for the island of La Gonave is that it would be a net exporter of food. There is plenty of land here to make this a reality. Planting a garden and a tree demands foresight and patience. Placing seeds in the earth today doesn't put food in children's bellies today. But a garden can feed the family in a month or two, and trees, when planted, will start fruiting out in 3-5 five years, providing harvests that will feed and provide income for decades.

The good news is that Starfysh is experiencing eager buy-in of these truths by the people of La Gonave. Farming is in their DNA. They understand and get excited about the game-changing potential of bringing their island back to its original agricultural life. When we distribute bags of seeds and tree seedlings, you might think we were distributing gold. And maybe we are. I'm sure most of them would rather have a few trees in their hands than a handful of gold coins.

Life Garden, Starfysh's demonstration and research farm, slowly continues to morph into what we have been dreaming for years it would someday become, a place where we study and propagate and distribute plants and trees that will find their way to homes all across the island. A place where farmers come to learn and get ideas for their growing situations. A home base from which we send agriculture-by-extension educators to visit villages with practical lessons on nutrition and farming. Creating Life Garden has been a slow journey, one which, frankly, we thought at the outset would go much faster. But, like a strong mango tree, our roots are growing deep and we are bearing more and more fruit each year. And the cool thing is, our other areas of work are only enhanced by what is happening with agriculture. The rising tide of our agriculture efforts is raising the ships of our economics, water, education, and health efforts.

The overall mood of mainland Haiti is one of discontent and worry, and this has certainly affected the people out on the island where the mood is more that of discouragement and despair. The people living here are fully aware that other nearby Caribbean islands flourish and that the origins of Haiti's plight are steeped in political corruption and instability. But in the middle of La Gonave's suffering and discouragement, a faint spark of hope is beginning to flicker. We can sense it. La Gonavians can sense it. And we're all doing what we can to blow on the embers.

Try as we might, our words and pictures fail to fully express what life is like here on the island. Words and pictures can never accurately describe the practical, day-to-day difference that Starfysh is making, all made possible with the support of you who believe in our work, and express your belief through your prayers and financial support.

"A journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step," goes the ancient Chinese proverb, more literally translated, "A journey of a thousand miles starts beneath one's feet." And so it is with us. Beneath our feet lies a miracle waiting to happen, if only we take the first step in faith. Don't wait. Mail in a gift. Pray on our behalf. Take the first step. We'll make the journey together.

I hope you enjoy this Summer edition of Starfysh News and that you will consider partnering with us in bringing transformative hope to the precious people of La Gonave.

Many blessings on you all,

Steve Edmondson



## Coming Soon: Haitian Coffee



After a year of planning and preparation, we excitedly announce the arrival of Haitian coffee to the American marketplace in the Fall of 2019. Grown and picked by private farmers high in the mountains of Haiti's mainland, the high quality "blue bean" coffee will be roasted and packaged in Haiti, although several American roasters have expressed strong interest in adding this Haitian coffee to their repertoire. Organized in co-ops, Haitian farmers receive a very good price for their harvests. The coffee will initially be available as "ground bean" with "whole bean" to follow. The coffee will be sold under the label "Life Garden Coffee" at [lifegardencoffee.com](http://lifegardencoffee.com). 100% of profits will be poured back into buying and planting more trees on the island of La Gonave.



Above: Life Garden staff get young coffee trees ready to plant. Below: Coffee beans drying under the warm Caribbean sun.





# AGRICULTURE



## Life Garden "Sea-Level" Campus

Our first and main Life Garden campus is situated at sea-level in the village of Anse-a-Galet on property owned by WISH (West Indies Self Help), a Christian relief and development organization with a 50-year history on the island with whom Starfysh is partnering to fight systemic poverty. Starfysh employs 17 people as part of its Life Garden staff. Here the staff is planting seedlings (*shown above*), always trying to keep ahead of the need for tree distribution and planting.



*Left:* Sea-level campus staff meet for devotions and prayer at the beginning of every week. *Center:* We try to maintain an assortment of at least 15 to 20 species of trees and plants in the shade nursery. *Right:* Experimental plots of new vegetable seed varieties.



## Life Garden “Mountain” Campus

Thousands of trees and garden vegetables are nurtured in Life Garden’s 4-acre mountain campus.



*Left:* Life Garden’s Mountain Campus allows us to test plant viability at higher altitudes. *Center:* Young banana trees (left) and papayas (right) growing in the mountains. *Far right:* Life Garden’s Mountain Campus mango trees yield thousands of pieces of fruit each year.



## Starfysh Welcomes Natalie

Welcome Starfysh's newest addition, agronomist Natalie Mathieu, who received her Bachelor's degree after serving a 4-month internship with Starfysh in 2018. Natalie's high energy and passion for teaching is just the ticket for equipping island farmers, present and future, for successful, highly productive futures in agriculture. She especially loves to visit schools and share her knowledge and passion with teachers and students. We captured this photo of Natalie presenting a lecture to students at our school in Mare Cochon.



# Life Lessons

Life Garden was designed to be more than a greenhouse for seedling distribution across the Island of La Gonave. It was also intended to be a teaching resource for farmers and residents. These images are just a snapshot of how that is happening at both of our Life Garden campuses. On this day, farmers gather at Life Garden's Mountain Campus for valuable lessons. At the end of their lesson, they return home with plants for their home garden. The plants they are holding (shown below) are papayas. The plants at their feet are leeks and the plants in the foreground are mango tree seedlings.

Our goal is to continue sharing these life sustaining lessons and plants with people all over La Gonave.





## Social “Status”

Many will remember in Starfysh’s earlier days when we posted updates and pictures on Facebook on a daily basis. It was a great way to keep followers and supporters informed and in the loop and an easy way for folks to share our story in their own circles of friends. A few years ago, however, we noticed a sudden drop-off in our ability to reach our followers. Facebook’s algorithms were no longer kind to our cause. Our posts showed up on very few of our followers’ feeds and Facebook began assessing “boost” charges to push our posts out to all our followers. Sadly, we decided to curtail our posts.

This all said, we do not underestimate the tremendous power that social media can have in sharing our story and we want to start posting again. We will not, however, pay the “boost” charges in order for all of our followers to see our posts. WE ARE ASKING FOR YOUR HELP. When one of Starfysh’s FB posts happens to show up in your feeds, we ask you to LIKE, COMMENT, and SHARE them. Thank you! It is our hope that soon everyone who “follows” us will actually see us!

## Partnership Opportunities

The most frequent question we hear is, “Is there any progress being made in Haiti?” Great question. And, while the political turmoil is definitely taking its toll on day-to-day life on the mainland, Starfysh’s work out on the island has carried on, uninterrupted, and progress continues to be made. We are immensely thankful for those of you who give regularly throughout the year. You should know that the great majority of your gifts find their way to the island where they pay wages for Starfysh staff and the ongoing supplies (tools, seeds, etc.) to keep the development ball rolling. Your monthly gifts are taking us through the lean Summer months of the giving cycle and we have consistently and without fail “made payroll” on time for all 58 Starfysh employees. Think of it. Aside from all else we are doing with agriculture and education, etc., Starfysh serves as the major source of income for 58 families on La Gonave.

We also recognize that many of you prefer to give periodically, as needs are presented. Though they range in amount, all needs here are important as we look to push forward strong in the second half of 2019. Here are some of our current needs....

- Container Shipping — Starfysh currently has supplies in staging, enough to fill two 40 ft. containers, and we’re simply awaiting issue of a “franchise” number. As soon as we receive it, the the containers will be packed and shipped right away. Cost: \$5,000 per container (includes container purchase and shipping).
- 2019/20 Guesthouse Lease — The “Starfysh House” is the central hub for staging our project activities and serves as “home” to the dozens of guests we receive each year. ~~Cost: \$9,000.~~ **NEED MET!**
- Coffee and Fruit Trees — It costs an average of \$3.00 to purchase, nurture, distribute, and plant a quality fruit tree on the island of La Gonave, a tree that will produce food and income to a family for decades. Cost: \$3/tree.
- Latrines — Several hundred families living in the mountains of La Gonave have heard and bought in to the importance of using latrines and they have dug deep latrine pits and are waiting for us to provide them with cement to build a cap and toilet stool over the pit. Cost \$30 per latrine.

However you choose to give, thank you! Your gifts are making a real and significant difference.



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To learn more about our work, our organization, or to support our projects with a donation, visit our website.

[www.starfysh.org](http://www.starfysh.org)