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# WorldArk



THE MAGAZINE OF HEIFER INTERNATIONAL © MAY 2012

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Strength | 28**

HEIFER ECUADOR

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# Do something twice as good



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# Dear Fellow Activists,

WHEN I MOVED TO ARKANSAS TO WORK FOR Heifer International, I looked forward to helping end poverty all over the world. It turns out that my work takes me not only to secluded villages on faraway continents, but also to small towns and communities within a day's drive. Poverty exists even where we might not expect it, and it can be much closer than we realize—or want to admit. The poverty here in the United States is difficult to accept and embarrassing.

Many Americans are just one major illness or job loss away from sliding below the poverty line, and millions are already there. Roughly 46 million people in the United States live below the official poverty line. One in every five children in the country is food insecure, meaning he or she may have to forgo meals or nutritious foods because there's not enough money to pay for them.

Over the next few months, as politicians gear up for the November elections, you'll see fingers pointed in every direction. Yet people are still struggling to survive, and they need solutions, not someone or something to blame. At Heifer, our nearly 70 years of experience show that poverty isn't inevitable.

Donors frequently ask me how they can support our work here in the United States. Today, I'm pleased to tell you about our new approach to improve nutrition, boost local economies and promote good health in the American South.

Heifer USA recently kicked off Seeds of Change, a five-year project that will support and cultivate sustainable community food systems and create jobs in Arkansas and Appalachia. Heifer USA will collaborate with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and other partners to build a food-system value chain that connects farmers with businesses, markets and their communities. I love that this project links healthy local food and meaningful work.

So how do you fit in to this transformation? Maya Angelou said, "When you learn, teach. What you get, give." Poverty, both in the United States and the rest of the world, is not someone else's problem to solve. To see change, we must take action. I invite you to turn to Page 26 of this issue or



*Heifer International President and CEO Pierre Ferrari speaks to community members in the Arkansas Delta town of Hughes.*

visit Heifer's website ([www.heifer.org](http://www.heifer.org)) to learn how you can directly support Seeds of Change. With your help, Heifer USA will help families in need become empowered, self-reliant and economically stable.

Thank you for your continuing support.

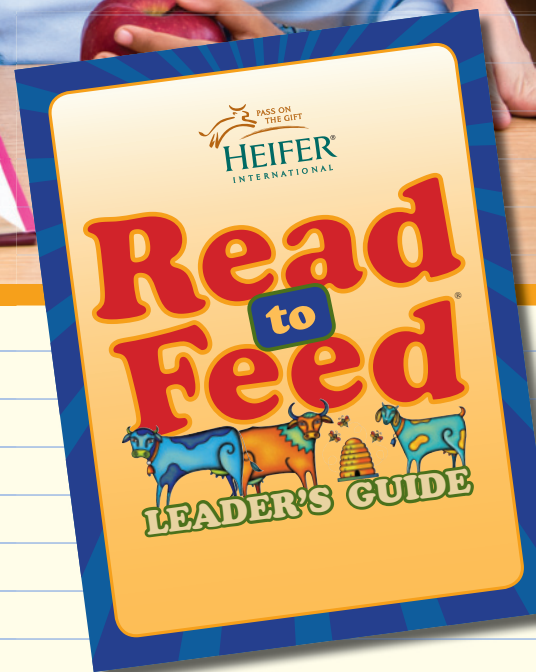
Sincerely,

President and CEO Pierre U. Ferrari

This summer create a  
better world one story at a time.



Share the Read to Feed program with your local library or camp and foster a generation of globally conscious youth. The program promotes Heifer International's gifts of livestock and training to help millions of people around the world feed their families and reach self-reliance.



### It's as simple as A, B, C.

- A. Share this page with libraries, camps and year-round schools
- B. Download Heifer International's **FREE** Read to Feed program resources at [www.heifer.org/getinvolved/read-feed](http://www.heifer.org/getinvolved/read-feed)
- C. Make a difference!  
Call **1 (877) 275-READ** to learn more.



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INTERNATIONAL



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With life-giving gifts and training from Heifer, mothers can care for their families in ways they've never dreamed.

*Cover: Sunainia Devi, age 38, poses with 12-year-old daughter Pooja Kumri at their home in Shitlapur village, India.*

*Cover photo by Russell Powell  
Top photo by Dave Anderson*

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**SUSTAINABLE PROTEIN**

I frequently read in articles about sustainability that we should give up meat because it isn't sustainable. Industrially farmed meat is definitely not sustainable, but not because it's meat. It's unsustainable because it relies on an unnatural diet of industrially produced grain for feed, and turns a valuable soil nutrient, manure, into industrial waste. Ruminants raised on grass (the diet they're constructed to eat), either in a rotational grazing system or in zero-grazing pens where the farmer gathers the forage, is very sustainable. In response to Elizabeth Verbeck, eggs and milk gotten from industrially raised chickens or factory farm dairies are not sustainable. This doesn't mean we shouldn't eat eggs or milk, but rather that we should seek out humane, sustainably raised sources. For me, that means grass-fed meats and dairy and pasture-raised eggs and chicken. I applaud Heifer's efforts to bring sustainable animal foods to people around the world who would otherwise go without.

LYNN KRAMER  
Athens, N.Y.

Thanks, *World Ark*, for bringing the awareness to readers and contributors that we all can make a positive impact on human dignity, world hunger and quality of life by showing that there are many right answers!

Being a rancher who is responsible for the health of many ruminant animals and the land where they graze, I feel the need to explain that grazing by ruminants (cattle, sheep, goats, llamas, etc.) can be and is a sustainable practice in some of the world. Much of the Earth's forage has evolved through the

tool of grazing by ungulates and there are intricate, symbiotic relationships between the "grazee" and "grazer." The vast and diverse life forms dependent on grazing range from microscopic fungi all the way to the meat-eating mammal. By applying this necessary tool properly, the health of the forage consumed, the organisms and soil supporting the plants, even the water quality and quantity below ground are enhanced.

Prudent use of all resources requires transfer of knowledge in many forms and periodic monitoring to ensure sustainable use. Thank you, Heifer, for being a leader in the selfless act of not only sharing what is known, but courageously exploring roads not previously used.

ART ROANE  
Ozona, Texas

**THE WORLD IS FILLING UP**

I've been a Heifer supporter for a few years. I would like to suggest Heifer incorporate family planning into its services. Most of the families featured in *World Ark* seem to have between three and 10 children. The family farm will only be passed down to one of these children, and the world's available arable land is shrinking. Your most recent issue of *World Ark* mentioned the need for increased agricultural productivity, but there's a limit to how much productivity can be squeezed from the Earth. Without limits on family size, the work Heifer does will not come close to keeping up with the needs of the communities it serves. Has Heifer put any resources into family planning education?

ANNE RETTENBERG  
New York, N.Y.

*Editor's note: Although Heifer International does not have specific family planning programs, it is part of the solution in two ways. First, many Heifer participants spend a portion of their newfound income on education for their children. Education, especially of girls, has been shown to directly affect birth rates. Second, and perhaps more important, is the result of Heifer's helping hungry people feed themselves. Studies dating back to the 1950s show that poverty contributes to overpopulation (and not the other way around). As long as children are seen as social security for old age or emergencies, or as a source of labor for a family struggling day to day, having as many children as possible is seen as an economic benefit. But when the standard of living of a society improves, the population rate begins to level off. As poverty declines, so will the birth rate. In this way, Heifer is an important player in the effort to bring population rates down.*

**Q&A FEBRUARY**

*How do you teach children the importance of giving?*

Children learn through modeling from their parents, family members, community, school and friends. It is essential to model and teach children early on ways to give back. The simplest method is learning to share with their friends and siblings. At an early age, when parents take their children to events where they can help others, this instills the importance of giving back. For example, we took our 3-year-old son to a food bank to volunteer. My son was fascinated, frustrated and curious about why volunteers were packing food for others. Throughout the whole process, he asked lots of questions. When children question, it helps them understand why, in this case, why we were giving up our Sunday morning to help others.

As children grow older it is important to keep modeling giving. For example, my husband and I donate our

*We want to hear from you! Please send your comments to [worldark@list.heifer.org](mailto:worldark@list.heifer.org). Include your name, city and a telephone number or e-mail address. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published online as well as in print. Because of the volume of mail we receive, we cannot respond to all letters.*



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Since 1944, Heifer has helped 15.5 million families in more than 125 countries move toward greater self-reliance through the gift of livestock and training in environmentally sound agriculture.

Heifer International is a member of InterAction, the largest alliance of U.S.-based international development and humanitarian non-governmental organizations, and of Global Impact. Federal and state employees may designate gifts to Heifer through payroll deduction by entering CFC #12079.

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Want to keep up-to-date with what's happening in the field and behind the scenes at Heifer while you wait for your next issue of *World Ark*? Point your web browser to [heifer.org/blog](http://heifer.org/blog) and join the conversation today.

time and money to numerous nonprofits, and we take the time to explain to our son what we do and why.

ULASH DUNLAP  
*San Francisco, Calif.*

I am the youth director at the Orange Congregational Church. In my experience, the best way to teach children the importance of giving is to get them involved with charity work as young as possible and as often as possible, whether it is making Valentine cards for people who are confined to their homes, singing Christmas carols in a nursing home, serving dinner at a homeless shelter, making Easter baskets for families struggling on welfare, building a Habitat for Humanity house or working at the Heifer farm in Massachusetts. Whatever form of giving you can get them involved with will only strengthen their understanding of why it is important to give. It's not what we say that will teach them, but what we do.

BETH RAFFERTY  
*Orange, Conn.*

We taught the kids about giving sort of by accident. We visited an excellent place in Thailand called The Elephant Nature Park (north of Chiang Mai) where the kids got a chance to visit with, feed and bathe abused elephants. Some of the stories were heartbreaking—an elephant that had stepped on a landmine, an elephant with her eyes gouged out by an abusive master. But it was so rewarding to see them in a loving place where they could roam and form herds and have enough to eat.

And the baby elephants were adorable.

When we got home, my daughter (age 9) decided to ask for money for the elephants instead of presents at her next birthday party. The next year, she collected donations for the local Humane Society (which we visited once with her Girl Scout troop). She had fun unwrapping dog and cat toys for her birthday.

Both of these organizations are real to her, and she totally understands what they do. We've also volunteered with a group that serves meals to homeless adults. So the kids have seen and done real volunteering, and they understand it in a tangible way. It's not abstract; we've tried to make it real.

We can't always afford international travel, but there are plenty of opportunities to volunteer locally so the kids can really understand where their donations are going. They hold back a little of their allowance every week and they get to decide where to donate it.

TINA RICKS  
*Portland, Ore.*

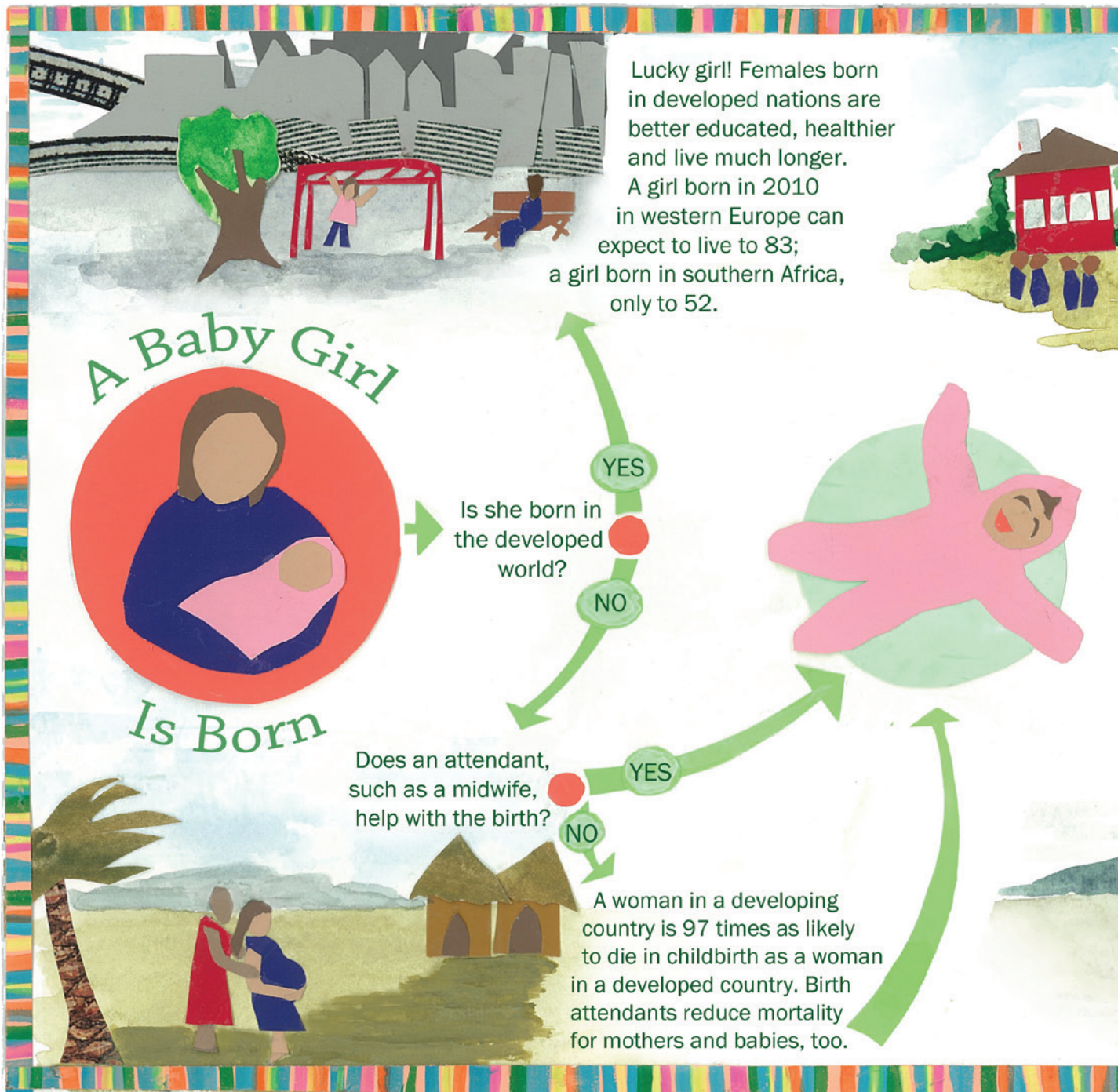
## Q&A MAY

*What, or who, has challenged your idea about what charity really means?*

E-mail your answers to [worldark@list.heifer.org](mailto:worldark@list.heifer.org). Please limit your answer to 250 words or fewer. We reserve the right to edit responses for length, clarity and grammar.

## FOR THE RECORD

### Facts & Figures



## The Hard-Boiled Numbers

You might think Americans are eating more of pretty much everything these days considering rising obesity stats, but in fact we're eating far fewer eggs than we did six decades ago. In 1950,

Americans put away an average of 389 eggs each. By 1990, that figure was down to 236. The latest numbers from the Department of Agriculture show that we're putting more laying hens back to work this century: Americans ate 247 eggs each in 2008.





GRAPHIC BY LAUREN ?

## Malaria Toll Update

The number of deaths caused by malaria in 2010 is more than double the World Health Organization's original estimate, according to new research. Scientists at the Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation found that malaria kills roughly 1.2 million people each year, not the 650,000 estimated by the WHO.

## Jargon

**HAIR SHEEP:** sheep covered in hair instead of wool. These sheep are easier to keep than woolly breeds because they don't require shearing, have a higher tolerance for heat and generally produce more offspring and milk. Usually kept as a food source, hair sheep yield lean, delicately flavored meat.

# MIT For Free



**W**e're lucky in the United States to get our K-12 education for free, but how about some Ivy League courses on top of that? Ten years ago the Massachusetts Institute of Technology introduced OpenCourseWare, giving anyone with Internet access a free pass to lecture notes, exams, videos and other materials from more than 2,000 courses. An estimated 100 million people worldwide have signed on.

Students include Jean Ronel-Noel and Alex Georges, entrepreneurs aiming to bring renewable energy to Haiti. Information from electrical engineering classes on MIT's OpenCourseWare taught them how to build solar panels. University students from Nigeria, Greece, Mexico and elsewhere are using the materials to supplement their own educations. And self-starters like Harihar Subramanian in India are logging on to polish skills in business, physics, electronics and writing. Now other universities, including Stanford, Carnegie Mellon and Johns Hopkins, are offering free courses online.

Think you've got what it takes to be an MIT student? Learn more at [ocw.mit.edu](http://ocw.mit.edu).



## Feast or Famine?

If you suspect your food budget is a bit high, there's an easy way to test out your theory. *Mother Jones* magazine staffers used statistics from the Department of Agriculture and credit card records to build a food-spending calculator. Users can see how their grocery and restaurant bills compare to others in their cities and across the country, and can also see average spending across income brackets, marital status and age. Find a link to the calculator at [motherjones.com](http://motherjones.com).

## Go Halfsies

**S**peaking of food budgets, those pricey restaurant meals can also be costly to your health. Portion sizes are huge, often double, triple or even quadruple the recommended serving size. Sometimes it's too tempting to resist, and sometimes you forget and leave the doggie bag on the table. Here's an idea: A new initiative set to launch in Austin and New York City offers diners a chance to share their meals with the hungry. The Go Halfsies initiative will allow diners in partner restaurants to pay full price for a half-portion. Doesn't seem like a very good deal, except that 90 percent of the proceeds go to organizations that fight hunger.

## It's a Good Thing, I Swear



If you occasionally spice up your tweets with words like %&^\* or @!#\$, maybe it's time to put your money where your dirty mouth is. Link the Charity Swear Box to your Twitter account and it will charge you every time you let a naughty word fly. The money all goes to charity. Visit [charityswearbox.com](http://charityswearbox.com) to sign up.

# Harvest: Lettuce

Sure, you can find spring lettuces like Bibb, arugula, Boston, mesclun and mache all year, but they're best when new leaves are harvested in the cool spring and fall months. Baby spring lettuces offer fiber, vitamin A and vitamin C for virtually no calories. Three cups of mixed, uncooked spring greens weigh in at only 15 calories, which is especially helpful after a long winter of eating heartier fare.



## Wilted Spring Lettuce Salad

### Ingredients:

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 clove garlic, smashed
- 2 tablespoons red wine or sherry vinegar
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- 1 head green or red leaf lettuce, or 5 cups of baby spring lettuce mix
- 5 green onions, thinly sliced
- 1/3 cup toasted almond slices or slivers

Brown the garlic clove in the oil over medium heat, then discard the garlic. Turn the heat to medium low and add vinegar, juice, sugar, salt and pepper. Stir until heated through. Toss the warm dressing with the lettuce and green onions, sprinkle with toasted almonds and serve.

## CORNERSTONES IN ACTION

For decades, families and communities around the globe have used the principles of Heifer's Cornerstones to build successful projects and become self-reliant. What exactly are these principles, and how can they help strengthen and enrich our own lives? *World Ark* is featuring a different Cornerstone in each issue, along with suggestions on how to put them into practice.

The 12 Cornerstones form the acronym **PASSING GIFTS**. This month: **Genuine Need and Justice**



**HOW IT WORKS:** This Cornerstone helps guide Heifer's work so that we provide livestock and training to those with a genuine need. That means adequate nutrition is iffy and money for medicine and education is scarce. In many cases, poverty is a result of discrimination and racism. Heifer seeks to facilitate justice by empowering those who are disenfranchised because of their ethnicity, sex or social status.

**IN ACTION:** Genuine need exists everywhere, not just in developing countries. So does discrimination and bias. Be generous with your time and resources, and be mindful of respecting people from different backgrounds.

*Genuine Need and Justice*

# Seed Savior

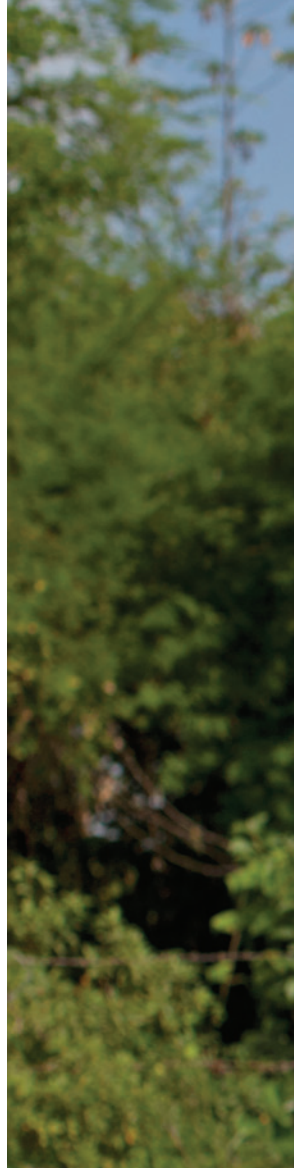
**P**EDRO CARBO, ECUADOR—It was late afternoon and Cesar Guale Vasquez had searched unsuccessfully all day. He visited almost all the farms in this rural area, walked through fields, picked through feed troughs, scoured kitchens. Nothing. As the sun faded, he approached one last farm. It was remote and belonged to a poor woman, and he didn't expect to find anything.

But there it was, hanging on a wire near the woman's smoky fire to keep pests and insects away—heirloom white corn. The woman was saving two ears, as she did every year, to replant her family's tiny patch of corn.

Vasquez is part of a seed-saving project in the coastal plain of Ecuador, an agricultural area dominated for decades by cash crops like cotton and corn, planted on large monoculture farms. Even the small farmers in the area began to buy newer seed strains that grow best with the addition of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Slowly, the local varieties that small farmers and families had depended on for generations began to disappear.

Vasquez and his organization are trying to find these traditional varieties and bring them back into cultivation on small farms. This white corn he discovered, for instance, is well adapted to the hot, dry conditions here and makes the best cornbread. He will grow it out to increase the number of seeds and then pass them freely to small farmers in his group or trade them for other local heirloom seeds.

The woman was hesitant to give up her only two ears of seed corn, but Vasquez explained his purpose to her. "She agreed to give us her two ears of ancestral corn and thanked us for what we were doing," he said. "That's often how it happens."





20-year-old Cesar Guale Vasquez tirelessly tracks down threatened heirloom seeds in the coastal plains of Ecuador. With the help of Heifer International and its local and regional partners, he returns the seeds to their rightful place of honor in the hands and gardens of rural farmers.

By **Jaman Matthews**, *World Ark* contributor  
Photos by **Dave Anderson**

## LEARNING FROM THE PAST

Vasquez—lean with his black hair coiffed into a shiny ridge along the top of his head—is 20 years old and has the fervor to match. He is a dynamo—searching out traditional food crops, urging small farmers to grow them and organizing seed swaps. He began working with traditional crops and seed saving when, after he finished high school, he found work in a plant nursery. From there, he became involved with FOCCAHL, a regional organization that partners with Heifer International to alleviate poverty and increase food sovereignty through training, seeds and livestock. Vasquez now runs both the seed-saving and youth projects for FOCCAHL.

But for Vasquez, it all started at home. He grew up here on his family's farm in the community of Fatima, a few miles outside the town of Pedro Carbo, helping with the chores and watching his grandmother as she cooked. The kitchen was outdoors, with raised vegetable beds all around. When she needed a tomato, she reached up and picked one; when she needed a pepper, she picked that, too. Like most of the small farms in the area, theirs was largely self-sufficient.

"We're not as good as my grandmother, but we're trying to keep that tradition alive," he said.

His family is again, two generations later, approaching self-sufficiency. "We grow the rice and the vegetables and the meat right here on our farm," he said, only venturing into grocery stores to buy staples like salt, sugar and oil. He is an evangelist who practices what he preaches.

"We grow the rice and the vegetables and the meat right here on our farm," only venturing into grocery stores to buy staples like salt, sugar and oil.

—CESAR GUALE VASQUEZ

One of the keys to greater self-sufficiency, Vasquez contends, is growing older varieties that were developed to fit the climate here. There's plenty of rain during the rainy season, but the dry season can be brutal. There are broad beans, peanuts, manioc and plantains, which are adapted to this climate but marginalized by the arrival of monoculture farming and inexpensive imported food.

Vasquez left the shade of his family's house and stepped into the harsh equatorial sun, past the sheep pen and down a rutted road to show us the vegetable garden, which he stocked with heirloom varieties. The garden—at 2.5 acres, it pushed the boundaries of the word—lay in a broad, flat area bounded by a neighbor's teak trees. Bean vines wound up corn stalks. The umbrella-like leaves of manioc—a staple root crop—flapped in the light breeze. Under the shade of a green tarp, coffee plants pushed through moist, black soil.

Water is a constant concern for farmers here. They have it in abundance during the three-month wet season, but it quickly dries up until the ground is a dull gray and cracked like old tarmac, and just as hard. In Vasquez's garden, irrigation drip lines—contributed to the project by Heifer International—run parallel to each row of seedlings. Groundwater is pumped from a well to a tank, which then gravity-feeds the drip lines. Careful irrigation is the only way to coax a crop out of this soil during the dry season.



Cesar Guale Vasquez shows off a local el giron squash that he helped rescue from the brink of extinction.



At the far end of the rows of vegetables is a more low-tech irrigation solution—a swale that collects rainwater. Now, just a few weeks into the dry season, it still has enough water to be considered a small pond—complete with tilapia swimming in it—but it will slowly dry to a puddle.

The earthen levee around the swale is planted thickly with crops that need more water—bananas, plantains, mangoes and melons. Half hidden in the dense growth is a huge squash, white and oblong. That, said Vasquez, is *el giron*, a local variety he and his organization have brought back from the brink of extinction. “I am especially proud of saving it,” he said.

### SEED SWAP

Ercilia Carlo Salazar’s house was planted in the middle of a cornfield, surrounded by rows of dry, brown stalks. The bottom floor of her house was built with large clay-red blocks; the second floor was unfinished—the walls gray cinder blocks wrapped with a multi-colored, striped tarp.



Community members share a variety of seeds from their gardens. A log of what each person brought and took away from the exchange is kept.



*Men gather for a community work party. The new storage structure will house staple crops and seeds.*

A blackened cauldron sat on a smoky, open-fire stove in front, and women darted in and out of the kitchen. Plastic chairs were stacked in the yard, and several men had begun to gather near what looked to be the frame of a small wooden building at the far end of the yard.

The sky was overcast, and even though the rainy season was officially over, it looked like rain. But when asked if it would, everyone answered definitively, in unison, “No, no.”

Beans and passion fruit twined along the barbed wire fence. Squash vines scrambled across the ground, every few feet displaying a yellow blossom or a greenish, almost white fruit. Skinny dogs slunk around the yard, while a hen and her chicks wove their way in and out of the corn stalks, searching for stray kernels.

A man on donkey back, whom we had passed on the drive in, slowly ambled up through one of the cornfields. From another direction, three men followed by two dogs appeared out of the corn.

Snarling and fighting ensued until the dogs were

One by one, the women stepped forward. Vasquez would ask “What did you bring and what do you need?” and then fill their small plastic bags with seeds. Whoever wanted seeds could get them.

chased away. Another man, in a ball cap and yellow shirt, arrived on a bicycle. A white pickup drove up the dusty road, and Vasquez and his family and several others crawled out of the back.

Vasquez coordinated the day’s seed swap and found this central location for the meeting. Heifer and FOCCAHL partnered with a small grassroots organization in this community to save traditional crops and ensure a steady supply of food. The community, called Voluntad de Dios (“The Will of God”), had a special significance for the seed savers. “The giron squash came from this community,” Vasquez said.

After lunch, the women pulled out small plastic bags of seeds and displayed them on the long table made of three rough planks lashed together with rope. The women crowded one side of the table, each pointing out what she



*At the seed swap, farmers proudly display and describe the varieties of corn, beans, peanuts and squashes they have brought to share.*

had brought and how it was used. Vasquez, overseeing the seed swap from the other side of the table, then announced each seed so everyone could hear. Off to one side, a woman with a clipboard kept notes on who was attending, what seeds they brought and what seeds they took home. Men also participate in the seed exchanges but on this day were working on their own related project.

“This is the gandul bean,” a wide-pod bean much like a fava bean, he said, holding up a small bag of dry, brown beans.

“This is a heirloom variety of white corn,” still on the cob.

“This is the seed of a big squash that looks like a watermelon,” good for making cakes, Vasquez said, pointing to a large squash on the far end of the table that had been grown from these seeds.

“Here we have purple peanuts,” that when shelled are almost black.

“As long as I can remember, we’ve had these peanuts,” added the woman who brought them. “My grandparents saved these seeds.”

The list of seeds grew—more beans, more corn, more squashes. When the seed swap began in earnest, it proceeded like a buffet. One by one, the women stepped forward. Vasquez would ask, “What did you bring and what do you need?” and then fill their small plastic bags with seeds. Yellow popcorn, shelling peas, cantaloupe. Whoever wanted seeds could get them. Tomatoes, rice, cilantro.

Vasquez fished out a handful of round seeds and dropped them into a woman’s bag. “We’ll expect you to bring cilantro seeds to the next seed swap,” he said to her. These seeds are given freely but with the expectation that each person grows them will then save seeds for themselves and to give away to others—their way of Passing on the Gift.

### SEED BARN

While the women swapped seeds, the men were occupied with their own project. At the edge of the yard, pushed up against the cornfield, a wooden building was taking shape. The 8-by-10 pole frame had been built earlier, and a dozen men with adzes, handsaws, wooden mallets, hammers and machetes were placing rough boards for the raised floor. Wood shavings littered the ground.



All the men had gathered for a *minga*, a community work party in the vein of an Amish barn raising. “One person can’t do anything by himself or herself. When it’s a group of people working together, you see how quickly it gets done,” said Cruz Arevalo, the woman who is president of the Voluntad de Dios grassroots organization.

An older man with graying hair, his shirt neatly tucked in, used an adze to hew the support joists so the floor boards would sit more evenly. Another man used a machete to form the end of a round pole into a square tenon. A young boy sat nearby in the shade on a stack of boards watching.

“Here they’re building a kind of a barn, to save the seeds that we’re recovering,” Vasquez explained. The floor is several feet off the ground to discourage rats, and any holes in the walls will be chinked. The seeds will be mixed with ash to discourage insects and stored in sealed containers.

Inside the barn, local varieties of corn and rice, staple crops, will take up the most space. The corn will be stored in the husk, and the rice will be stored in a sealed wooden silo inside the barn. Containers of the smaller seeds—tomatoes, beans, peas, squashes, melons—will line the walls. Still, the seed barn is meant only for short-term storage between seed swaps, two months at the most.

Vasquez is justifiably proud of the seed-saving project he has spearheaded. Not only has the group saved several heirloom varieties of vegetables from being lost, but they were now building the infrastructure to ensure that they never lose those crops again. But, lest they become too complacent with their present success and the new seed barn, Vasquez was quick to remind everyone, “The best way to save seeds is by planting them.” ■



# Sister Builds Family Business from Original Heifer **Sheep**

**C**ESAR GUALE VASQUEZ is not the only one in his family to capitalize on the help Heifer International brought to the Pedro Carbo area of Ecuador. His older sister, Brenda Guale Vasquez, is as impressive with her sheep as her brother is with his seeds.

Brenda Vasquez, 22, was the first in her family to attend university. She left for school in the city of Manta, about 100 miles away, intending to study medicine. “When I got there, there weren’t any more slots to study medicine.” The university was just starting a new program in agro-industry, so she signed up. “When I started studying, I thought it was so wonderful.”

“The purpose of my study,” she said, “was so I could come back to the countryside and I can work with my parents and help the community.” And she has done just that. Three years ago, while she was away at university, Brenda Vasquez’s parents received nine sheep from Heifer International. When she returned home earlier this year, the sheep became the perfect place to put her new education into practice.

The herd now stands at 43 sheep. They graze on pasture every morning and evening and are kept in a paddock with water and shade during midday. As Brenda Vasquez filled their water trough, she explained more about them. “These are called hair sheep. They don’t grow wool all over.” They are raised for their meat, which she said won a taste test at her university last year, beating pork and beef.

“It’s delicious,” she said, “but we also consider it a health food, healthier than, say, pork.”

Brenda Vasquez has turned her family’s nine original sheep into something much larger than simply a way to supplement their own diet; they are a marketing venture. “Other countries eat a lot more mutton than here in Ecuador,” she said, and she wants to change that.



Later that day, a truck pulled up and three sheep were loaded into the back. Slowly, it seems, a local market is growing, and the price is good, at \$2 to \$2.50 a pound. But that doesn’t mean she is resting on her success.

“We can begin by adding value—by not simply selling a slab of mutton,” she said, “but having it butchered and on a tray, like in the supermarket.

“Here, we just butcher the meat and sell it fresh,” Brenda Vasquez said, but her vision is to find ways to add more value to her meat and thereby earn a better price. She recently made her first batch of sheep sausage. “It’s important to be able to put food away for those months when nothing is harvested,” and sausage can be stored longer without refrigeration.

She is realistic about the steep investment it will take to set up the building, infrastructure and machinery necessary for such a venture, but she is also optimistic.

“I visualize that in the future we’ll be producing a lot of sheep. And I want to make meat products—the sausages—and sell them to the supermarkets and make a name for ourselves as producers of lamb.”

# This Man Wants

# BEET



*Biker Tommy "Catfish" Davis is joining forces with other riders to help end hunger and provide sustainably grown beef and produce.*

to Feed the

# GRAY

A biker church in North Carolina wants to end hunger in its neighborhood by linking farmers directly with those in need.

by **Fred Bahnson**, *World Ark* contributor  
photos by **Chris Carmichael**

I used to be a biker. Well, maybe that's a bit of a stretch. But I did own a motorcycle. In divinity school back in the late '90s, I rode a Honda Nighthawk. Back then I was a bad boy among the pious, a rebel in a black leather jacket who thought he was challenging the seminary status quo. My biking career was short-lived, though. I had a nasty wreck on a friend's motorcycle that left my right side flayed, my ego bruised and my wallet empty. Eventually I sold the motorcycle. But my inner seminarian never entirely displaced my inner biker.

When I learned that a group of bikers from a nearby town—members of a “biker church” no less—were starting a feeding ministry called The Giving Table, a social enterprise model that joins local farmers, churches and the hungry, I knew I had to meet them. I called up Dwight “Bubba” Smith, an associate pastor at Crossfire United Methodist Church who manages the church's feeding ministries. Smith told me to come up for their big “Jesus Rocks” motorcycle rally. They would be doing a free barbecue lunch for the hungry that day, and maybe we could even visit one of their partner farms.

On the first Saturday in May last year, I got out my old leather jacket, pulled on my leather boots and, in a sad attempt to earn myself some street cred with the bikers, asked my 6-year-old son to paste a dinosaur tattoo on my left bicep. As I left the house on my way to Crossfire, however, I had a startling realization. Despite the year I spent pretending to be one, I had never actually met any real bikers. I wondered if they were really as bad as my mama said they were.



When I arrived at 10 in the morning the rally was in full swing. A number of people were already in line for the free chicken, baked beans and coleslaw; some were donating blood at the Red Cross station; a few tattoo-covered bikers were giving slow rides to kids around the vast parking lot; others were practicing for the upcoming

Biker Olympics.

Crossfire United Methodist Church is located outside North Wilkesboro, N.C., in what once was a refrigerated trucking terminal. On the phone Smith described the building's defining features: big warehouse, industrial, chain-link fence topped by razor wire. “Come to think of it,” he said, “it looks kinda like a jail.”

Which is oddly apropos. On a Sunday morning visit to Crossfire I met a guy who told me he'd just been released from prison. He had gold pirate hoops hanging from both ears. Strapped to his right boot was a giant Bowie knife. During the service the congregation gave him a prodigal's welcome, with cheering and rounds of applause.

**I had never  
actually met any  
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as my mama said  
they were.**

Since its inception eight years ago, Crossfire has become known for welcoming not only bikers but also former convicts and other outliers on the bounds of respectability. Here you'll find ex-gang members, recovering drug addicts and alcoholics, recent returnees from the hinterlands of bad behavior. Not exactly the kind of folks

you'd expect to start a church. Or a food ministry. Most have left behind their wild past, or are trying to do so in Celebrate Recovery, Crossfire's rehab program. Ask any one of them and they'll tell you that the transformation they've experienced at Crossfire—spiritual, physical, emotional—is real. One way they share that new life is to help their hungry neighbors. Feeding people is part of their calling.

Associate Pastor Duncan Overrein told me about his desire to feed those whom society overlooks. With his big beard, long gray ponytail and tattoos, Overrein can relate to those who've been ostracized because of their past or the way they look. One Thanksgiving a few years ago he and his wife invited to their home 60 people, folks he met on the street who had no place to go. “We invited people who are rejected, who most people consider worthless. People who've been kicked around, moved from state to state. I had all kinds of scriptures going through my head that day, like the parable of the banquet where the master goes out and finds all the unworthy to come and feast.”

# Crossfire



Steve Whisnant (left) worships at Crossfire service. Tracy Ballard (below) prays with his son Trajan. (Bottom, left to right) Crossfire members Ricky Grimes, Tracy Ballard, Steve Whisnant and Allan Langlois pose with their bikes.





*At right, Steve Whisnant greets fellow members of the congregation. Below, church members compete in the Biker Olympics.*





**The heavy-duty altar is made of checker-plate aluminum that looks like chrome. Opposite the altar sits a full-scale wooden model of a Harley Davidson chopper. On the wall hangs a giant banner that says, Crossfire: Manning the Lifeboats One Foot From the Gates of Hell.**

Crossfire's mission to feed people has assumed a variety of forms. Every Wednesday the church provides up to 50 families with enough food to last them the entire week. Three of the congregants put in a total of 50 hours per week in the church food pantry, with others helping distribute the food. For the past several years, with help from other Crossfire members, Pastor Overrein has organized an acre-sized community garden and donated the produce to the needy. Partnering with Wilkes County, they received a \$358,365 grant to build a greenhouse on the former county landfill. Methane gas from the landfill will be captured and used to power the greenhouse, which will produce pesticide-free vegetables. Those vegetables will be stored in Wesley's Storehouse, the church's nonprofit entity that rents the building's 17,000 feet of cold storage space, then distributed to those in need.

The other part of Crossfire's building has been converted into a sanctuary. Sunday worship takes place in Cooler #1, where during the rally the Red Cross is holding its blood drive. I poke my head in and four bikers are laid out on gurneys, pumping their blood into bags. I look around the sanctuary. The heavy-duty altar is made of checker-plate aluminum that looks like chrome. Opposite the altar sits a full-scale wooden model of a Harley Davidson chopper. On the wall hangs a giant banner that says, "Crossfire—Manning the Lifeboats One Foot From the Gates of Hell."

One of the first bikers I met at Crossfire looked like he might be rowing one of those lifeboats, or had just clambered over the gunwales. With his black leather vest, tattooed forearms and a do-rag wrapped around his head,

Steve Whisnant looked like the kind of guy with whom you wouldn't want to tangle in a bar fight. But I soon learned that Whisnant was as warm and gregarious as could be. On his vest he wore a patch that said These Are My Church Clothes. We chatted over barbecue chicken. He wasn't too impressed by my dinosaur tattoo, but when I mentioned that I used to own a motorcycle, he took me for an equal. Let it be known here that I might have overstated my abilities and experience level just a wee bit, because Whisnant was soon offering to let me ride his Harley Davidson. I politely declined. I had never ridden a Harley before. My bluff had been called.



Whisnant's Harley was a 2009 Sportster model, deep marine blue with 1200 cc's of throaty power awaiting the slightest torque of the throttle. Were I to imagine the Platonic image of motorcycle, this is what I would conjure. A beautiful machine. It was tempting to take Whisnant up on his offer, but I didn't want to crash and have to buy another motorcycle. I wasn't here to look wistfully at Harleys.

I was here to learn about The Giving Table, Crossfire's newest and most ambitious of all its feeding ministries.



I saw Pastor Smith and Senior Pastor Alan Rice across the parking lot, and walked over to ask them how The Giving Table started. When Crossfire was trying to figure out how to make use of the cold storage space in their new building, Rice explained, they hired an agricultural economic development consultant to do a feasibility study. Initially the consultant thought they might be able to buy vegetables from local farmers and market them.

But, they learned in the feasibility study, Wilkes County was 98th out of 100 counties in the state in vegetable production. It was fourth, however, in beef. Many of Wilkes' cattlemen, lacking a local market, were forced to sell their steers cheap to Midwestern feedlots. Through their Methodist connections, Rice and Smith knew that a growing number of churches in North Carolina were seeking hormone-free, pasture-raised beef.

And then there was the fact of hunger. North Carolina ties with Arkansas for sixth place among states with the greatest food insecurity, and among North Carolina counties Wilkes is one of the poorest. Hunger even among parishioners at Crossfire is a real issue. Of the 120 regular attendees, at least 30 are unemployed. For food pantries, it is especially challenging to find affordable sources of beef.

With these facts before them, it soon became clear to the bikers of Crossfire that they could serve as a hub, connecting local farmers with consumers for the benefit of the hungry, creating jobs for unemployed church members, and thus forming a circular relationship in which every participant benefits. They would buy finished steers from local farmers, start a community-supported agriculture venture to market the beef and greenhouse veggies and donate 10 percent of every cow to the Second Harvest food pantry. The Giving Table's mission is to "provide local, high-quality grass-fed beef to our consumers while promoting sustainable economic development in rural North Carolina and fighting to stop hunger in our community through beef and produce donations."

They have received several grants and are finalizing the arrangements with a local slaughterhouse before they begin. Combined with their greenhouse project, their food pantry and the high unemployment in their congregation, it's a lot for a small church to take on. But Pastor Rice believes Crossfire is well suited to the challenge. "Many of the mainline denominations become so risk-averse that they spend the majority of their time calculating the risks. But here we've said, 'So what if we fail? We'll learn from that and move ahead.' At least we're



moving ahead in faith."

I asked Smith if we could see one of the farms that would supply their beef. It was early afternoon now, and the rally was in a bit of a lull. Smith rounded up a group to escort us. I asked Whisnant if I could ride on the back with him, but he wouldn't hear of it.

"Take my bike, man. I can ride Amy's."

"Really, I can't. It's been 11 years since I've ridden a motorcycle."

"Naw, take it man. Once you learn how to ride, you never forget."

"But I don't have my motorcycle permit," I pleaded. I was running out of excuses.

"That's OK. For years I didn't either, and I never got busted."

My inner biker was now in serious conflict with my inner law-abiding citizen. I already had my leather jacket and boots. Whisnant

held out a pair of gloves and a helmet. Peer pressure won out. Soon my inner biker found himself astride a Harley amid a half-dozen other Harleys, a phalanx of chrome and flesh and steel roaring through the North Carolina hill country at 55 miles per hour.



After an exhilarating 20 minutes we arrived at Apple Brandy Farms, a pastured-beef operation Smith hopes will supply some of the cows for The Giving Table. The farmer, Seth Church, was down in Georgia buying cows, so we were met by Church's mother. We parked the bikes near the pasture gate and walked over to see the steers, mostly Black Angus with a few Herefords, while Smith and Whisnant provided a running commentary.

"Man," Whisnant said, "whenever I see a cow I think: steak."

"Yeah, me too," Smith said. He hollered at the steers. "Come here, T-bone! Look this way, Sirloin!"

"Hey, A-1; hey, Bar-b-que!"

We headed over to the large open-air feeding shed where we learned about Church's operation: They are not certified organic, but they use many organic prac-

tices, eschewing hormones or antibiotics. They raise the steers primarily on grass, moving them to fresh pasture every two or three days, then finish them on locally-grown corn. Church spreads the cow manure back on his fields to increase fertility.

The cows do a pretty good job of spreading manure on the fields, too. As we walked, Whisnant started playing hopscotch over the patties. Everybody laughed when he nearly stepped in one. I pointed admiringly to the large pile of cow manure in the shed and said I wished I had it for my garden. "Around here," Whisnant said, "most people put that on their marijuana crop." He explained that Wilkes County used to be known for moon-

shiners; now marijuana is a major cash crop. As I looked out at the cows munching away on their pasture, it occurred to me that maybe The Giving Table will help Wilkes County become better known for growing the legal kind of grass.

It was time to ride back, and we bid our goodbyes to the cows and the farmer's mom. As I cruised down the road with my newfound biker brethren, I thought about the beautiful paradox at the heart of Crossfire: bikers and beef, Harleys and hunger. I remembered something Pastor Overrein had told me earlier. "Man, all this time, bikers just want people to know that we're people, too. We just want to feed people." ■

## A Bumpy Ride

By Fred Bahnson

Since riding the Harley that day back in May 2011, a whole year has passed. Before this article went to print I decided to check in with Pastor Alan Rice and see how things were progressing with The Giving Table project.

"Slower than we hoped," he said. As of late January, two unforeseen bottlenecks had prevented them from making their first sale of beef. One was the need for a new website. The existing website simply couldn't handle the volume of sales they planned to make, and the web company building their new site was slow to deliver.

But perhaps the biggest obstacle to starting The Giving Table was the same challenge faced by beef farmers across the country: the shortage of small-scale local slaughterhouses. Mays Meats, the nearest facility, currently has a three- to four-month wait to get a steer slaughtered, making it difficult for The Giving Table to fill the volume of orders they expect.

"You know, I must have been out at seminary the day they taught us to do all this," Pastor Rice joked. "It's been a tedious process." Despite the challenges, the project is slowly making headway. Given that the bikers of Crossfire are trying to

do nothing less than create a regional food system from the ground up, such challenges were to be expected.

Despite his frustration at the bureaucratic bottlenecks, Pastor Rice was quick to list the many successes of the past year. There is a great demand for the kind of local, pastured meat that The Giving Table plans to sell.

Jeffrey Scott, project director for Heifer USA's Appalachia Region, is impressed by Crossfire's efforts.

"They are leading the way in building viable income opportunities for lower income individuals, utilizing sustainable agriculture and the rapidly growing local food movement," he said.

A new greenhouse is complete, and with it Crossfire is poised to supply farmers and consumers in a five-county radius with vegetable seedlings for summer crops. A grant arrived to buy a tractor and cultivator. Pastor Duncan Overrein is eager to take it around the county this spring to till people's gardens for free. A missionary tractor, you might say. And several days before I talked with Pastor Rice, a team of dentists had set up their chairs in Cooler #1 and performed \$55,000 worth of free dental care. For the bikers of Crossfire it gave a new meaning to the phrase, "getting your choppers fixed."

I asked Pastor Rice if he was hopeful. "Oh, we're beyond hopeful. We're confident that we're moving ahead." ■

# Neighbors in Need

## Heifer Plants Seeds of Change in Appalachia, the Arkansas Delta

**F**or many Americans, malnutrition means swollen bellies and jutting ribs in countries far away. But hunger and disease caused by poor diets happen in the United States far more often than you might expect. In 2010, nearly 50 million Americans lived in households where there simply wasn't enough money to buy adequate amounts of nutritious foods. That's why Heifer International is starting a bold new initiative here in the United States.

Heifer's Seeds of Change will initially focus on two of the most severely impoverished areas in the U.S., the Arkansas Delta and Appalachia. These regions are marked by fertile soil and strong agricultural traditions, but small-scale farmers there still find it hard to make a living. While the raw ingredients for a strong local food economy are in place, many people in the Delta and Appalachia are malnourished. By boosting production and marketing capacity of local, small-scale farmers and helping to make locally grown produce more accessible, the Seeds of Change project aims to boost nutrition and economies in places that need help most.

Poverty rates in the South are rising faster than anywhere else in the country. In parts of the Appalachian regions of North Carolina and Tennessee, almost one in three children go hungry at least part of the time because there's simply not enough money for food. In the Arkansas Delta, nearly one in four people are food insecure, meaning they're not certain

where their next meal will come from, or if it will even materialize at all.

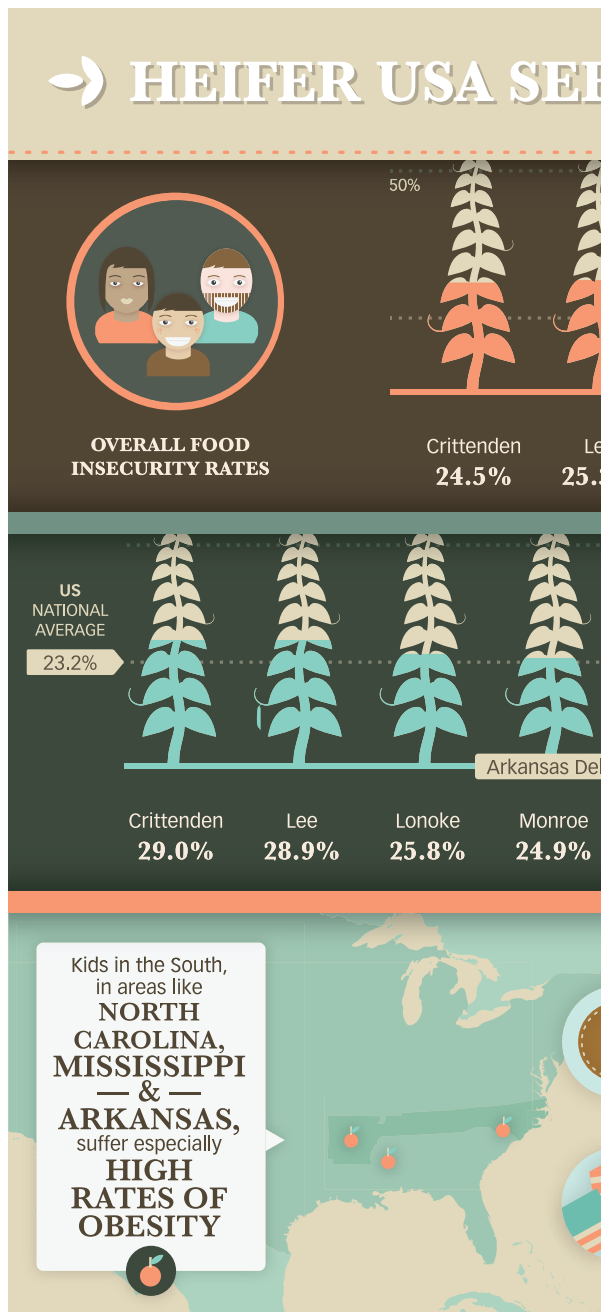
And then there's the other side of the coin. While nutritious food is often too pricey or hard to find, junk food costs little and is easy to come by. As a result, heart disease, stroke, diabetes and other diseases directly linked to poor nutrition are on the rise.

A reinvigorated network of small- and medium-scale farmers tied into their local and regional economies could change that, and farmers like Everette Woods want to be part of it. Woods' 250-acre farm in Colt, Ark., spills over multiple fields and across a grid of tree lines, but it's a fairly tiny operation compared to most working farms in the region. Previous generations of Woods' family worked up to 1,000 acres to raise hogs and



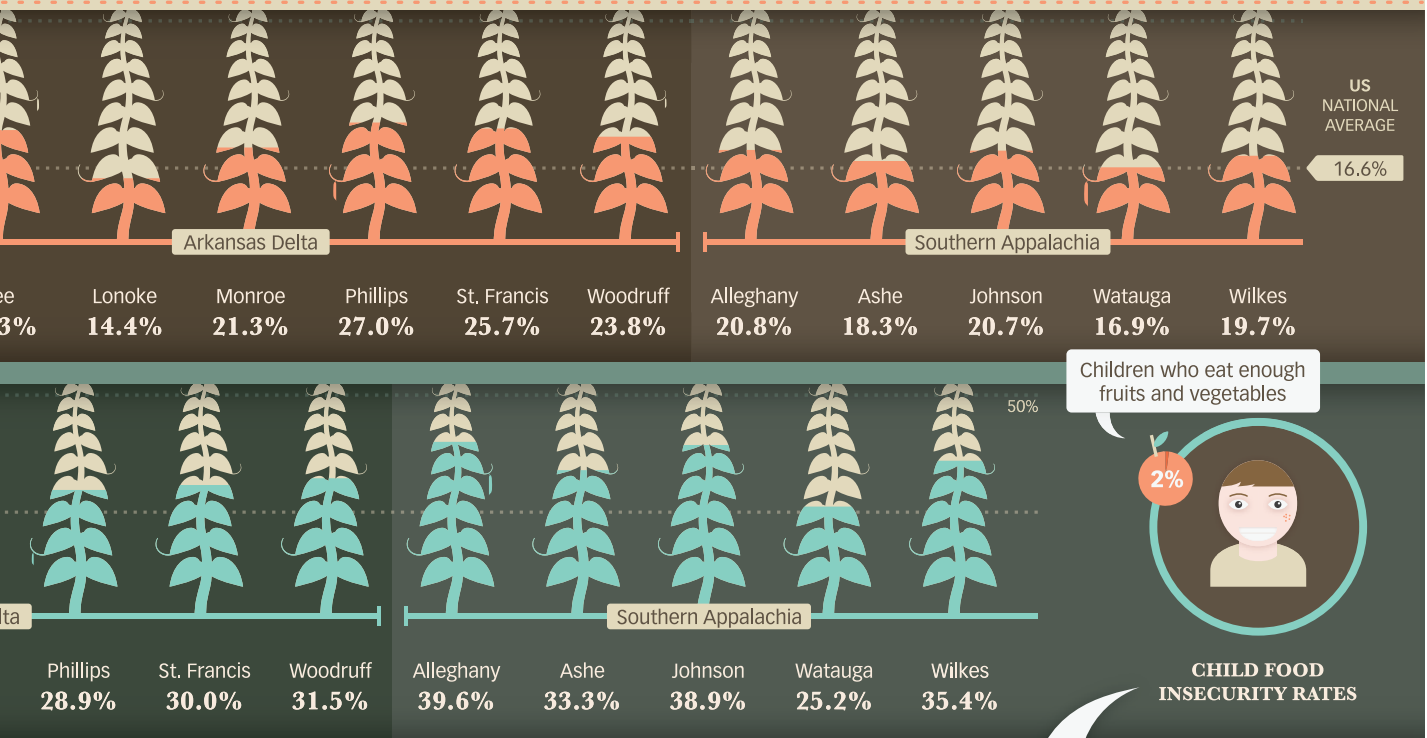
**Everette Woods near a rusted combine on his farm in St. Francis County, Ark.**

PHOTO BY RUSSELL POWELL



# SEEDS OF CHANGE

Seeds of Change is a project to grow jobs, improve health and end American poverty. Heifer USA plans to work with smallholder farmers in the Arkansas Delta and North Carolina and Tennessee counties of Appalachia shown below.



**DIET-RELATED DISEASE** affects low-income children the most.



**\$147 BILLION:** the amount the U.S. spends yearly on obesity-related illnesses

of children of color are expected to develop **DIABETES** during their lifetimes

1 out of 3 children born in the year 2000 is on track to develop **TYPE II DIABETES.**

1 out of 4 young adults is too **OVERWEIGHT** to qualify for military service.

1. Map the Meal Gap — FeedingAmerica.org (<http://bit.ly/fSqkix>)  
 2. FoodCorps.org  
 3. USDA

FFUNCTION, INC.

grow rice, wheat, vegetables and soybeans. The land is still just as fertile; it's the economic landscape that changed.

“Most of the small farmers have gotten out,” Woods said. He spent decades as a long-haul trucker to support his wife and children, but after retirement he came back to the soil. Woods farms because he loves it, and because he wants his children and grandchildren to love it, too. “I want to try to keep it in the family. This is what our forebears worked hard to achieve.”

Working with his son and with a bit of help from his

seven grandchildren, Woods breaks even each year. But what if he and other small farmers in the Delta could do better than that? What if they could once again thrive?

Through Heifer’s Seeds of Change, farmers will get the agricultural materials, equipment and training in sustainable business development, agriculture production and distribution processes they need to grow and market healthy food to improve nutrition and boost local economies.

Won’t you join Heifer in this bold new initiative to give American families the dignity of self-reliance? ■

# Mothers:

## PILLARS OF STRENGTH



The bond between a mother and her child is unbreakable, even as hunger and poverty threaten health and happiness daily around the world. With life-giving gifts and training from Heifer, mothers can care for their families in ways they've never dreamed.

BY ANNIE BERGMAN, *WORLD ARK SENIOR WRITER*

**D**URING THE WAR in Kosovo in 1999, Ryve Bobi endured incomprehensible tragedies. As Serbian soldiers forced her from her home at gunpoint, she heard the shot that killed her husband, Nur. After months as a refugee, she returned home to find the source of her livelihood, her livestock, slaughtered.

What the war didn't take was her children. And the mother of eight thanks God for that every day, she said.

"I missed my husband, but they didn't burn my house, and I had my children. There were some people who had nothing," Bobi said.

Though the family became closer after the war, the bond with her eight children—five girls and three boys—grew even deeper after the family received a cow from Heifer International in 2006.

Today, she is able to feed her family more nutritious foods, like the milk and yogurt from her cow and the vegetables she grows in her garden with the help of the animal's manure. She's even paying for college classes for a few of her children, a luxury she never thought she could afford.

And Bobi's children take care of her, too. "They knew I suffered so much, they are so happy for me now," she said.



▲ Ryve Bobi, 49, pictured with her daughter, Resmije, remembers the day her husband was taken by Serbian forces and killed. "I could see the forces from our yard," she said. "I thought, 'even if I die I don't want anything to happen to my children.'"

Around the world, Heifer works directly with women to not only help them recover from war, disaster and hopelessness, but to empower them as they gain status in their families and communities. When women receive opportunities like those that Heifer presents, it's proven that they are more likely to pass those benefits to their children.

In each Heifer project, one constant is a mother's wish to make a better life for the next generation by giving them education, better nutrition and a safe and comfortable home. Mothers work tirelessly to make those dreams come true.



PHOTO BY MATT BRADLEY



◀ Pao Chanthy, 46, cares for her grandson Vam Rasmey, 6 months, prior to giving him a bath at the family's home in Svay Rieng Province, Cambodia.





PHOTO BY GEOFF OLIVER BLOBBEE

▲ Regina Huasco and her 7-month-old granddaughter Gloria Mamani Ruelas attend a community meeting of alpaca farmers in Sococoni, Bolivia. Gloria was an orphan, but now has a loving family to support her. A Heifer alpaca project provides income and manure for better crops. "We also use the wool from these alpacas to make sweaters and even mattresses," Huasco said.



PHOTO BY GEOFF OLIVER BOGGBEE

▲ Ganga Khanal, of Jirouna, Nepal, said she "used to believe it was more important to educate or provide for my sons than for my daughters. But the trainings changed all that for me. Today, my daughter is in the army. My daughter has made me realize and understand that girls are no less than boys." Her 17-year-old son, Sudip, learned that same lesson from his mother. "I have so much respect for these women who have created opportunities for people like me," Sudip said.

► In the village of Kakira in northern Uganda, Christine Aanyu, 37, cares for her 20-month-old daughter. Aanyu and her husband are both HIV positive but are able to stay relatively healthy thanks to medicine and healthy diets. They use Heifer oxen to cultivate cabbage, cowpeas and peanuts.



PHOTO BY DERO SANFORD

◀ *Alvina Lopez Pineda, 38, with six of her nine children. She is a recipient of a bee project in Santiago-Puringla, Honduras. Pineda says she hopes all her children graduate from school and go on to college or technical school.*



PHOTO BY GEOFF OLIVER BUCBEE



PHOTO BY MATT BRADLEY

▲ Tran Thi Phuong, age 45, works on the family farm in Gia Lam Village, Vietnam, along with daughters Hoang Anh Ly, 15, and Hoang Mai Ly, 13. They are both excelling in school thanks to the increased income their Heifer gifts are providing. "Before Heifer we had no hope for our children," she said.

► Lilit Tadevosyan and her mother, Anush Ghazaryan, sit under one of the family's apple trees in Armenia. Ghazaryan said that the Heifer project has allowed her to overcome obstacles that she couldn't have achieved by herself, including educating her children. "For every Armenian their house and their children's education are the biggest priorities. My daughter was always one of the best students. It is every parent's responsibility to help their child find their place in life."



► *Widow Eliosi Nalawanga of Butanza, Uganda, cares for her grandchildren while her daughter is away working in Kampala. A Heifer cow named Ruth provides milk and biogas for cooking.*



PHOTO BY JAKE LYELL

PHOTO BY GEOFF OLIVER BURGEE

# Giving Children **Room to Read**



Books are more than just a pastime for Room to Read founder Erin Ganju. They're passports to a better future. A lifelong love of reading and a wish to help others steered Ganju away from a career in international business and into the nonprofit sector. In 2000 she co-founded Room to Read, an organization that has so far provided libraries and schooling to 6 million children in developing countries.

By Annie Bergman, *World Ark* senior writer

**WorldArk:** *Why did you leave your job in the for-profit world to co-found Room to Read?*

**ERIN GANJU:** This was an act of pure passion. I had a successful business career in investment banking and international business development, but I didn't LOVE what I did. Instead, I found myself dreaming of a job that would be consistent with what I am passionate about, with what I was meant to do. This was a sign that I needed to find a way to integrate my personal values with my work. Thus, I decided to heed the words of John Burroughs who said "Leap, and the net will appear" and become a social entrepreneur. By following my passion, I am not only much happier, but also more productive at my job, because I care deeply about what I do. My father was a professor and my mother was a social worker, and I grew up traveling and living abroad. I worked in Vietnam for almost three years in the mid-1990s establishing Unilever's business there. All of these factors combined to steer me in the direction of co-founding Room to Read.

**Room to Read started in Nepal. Why?**

Room to Read had its humble origins in 2000 in Nepal, where we began bringing donated books to rural communities. Many of these communities have illiteracy rates as high as 70 percent. John Wood, my co-founder, had traveled in Nepal and after seeing an alarming lack of books in the schools, was moved to do something. Room to Read was founded on the belief that through action, we all have the capacity to make profound changes in our world. Today, we are a global organization dedicated to promoting education through programs focused on literacy and gender equality. We work in 10 countries in Asia and Africa. Yet, more than 300 million children around the world do not have access to education and most likely will never learn to read or write. By empowering children through education, we see a world in which all children are able to realize their full potential.

**How do you choose the countries in which you work?**

We work in several countries in one region to stay cost-effective. We work

in South Asia, Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Within a region, we select countries based on socio-economic conditions, the applicability of Room to Read's programs to the educational needs of a country and the enabling environment that exists in a country for an international nonprofit (political stability, nonprofit landscape, natural partners, etc.). As a relatively small nonprofit, however, one of the key determinants in our ability to expand into new countries is our ability to raise the funds to support additional countries without taking away from our current work.

**What are some of the challenges you face once the libraries are set up?**

The greatest challenges we face are training librarians and teachers how to manage the libraries and integrating libraries into school and classroom activities to have the greatest impact. Our solution was to develop a more holistic literacy program that enables primary school children to become independent readers. Room to Read focuses on developing reading skills and the habit of reading in primary



PHOTO SUBMITTED BY ERIN GANJU

**Room to Read co-founder Erin Ganju sits among students in Vietnam who received both a new library and local-language books from Room to Read.**

school students because literacy is the foundation for all future learning. We do this mainly by establishing libraries, increasing access to age-appropriate and culturally relevant reading materials and improving the child friendliness of the school environment. We have recently increased our support for reading instruction, including creating materials and providing training for teachers.

***Tell me about the books you provide.***

One of the greatest challenges to early adoption of the habit of reading in developing countries is a lack of high-quality, age-appropriate children’s books in the local language. Often, the few books that are available are either secondhand books in foreign languages or low-quality, black and white books for more mature readers. Rarely are there supplemental reading materials available which may be appropriate for children in the government public schools that we work in. Since we were unable to purchase such books to fill our school libraries, Room to Read went into the publishing business. Our book-publishing program provides children with materials that will inspire them to read, expand their minds and develop a lifelong love for learning. To help

create a vibrant children’s literature market, we also train writers and illustrators in the countries where we work. Our local language books are generally published in-country and distributed to school libraries. Room to Read has successfully published more than 550 titles in 25 languages in eight countries.

***In some cultures, education—especially for girls—isn’t valued. How do you address this in the communities where you work?***

We have found parents and communities to be very enthusiastic about the educational investments we are making in their schools. Parents I meet around the world strive to ensure that their children have an easier and better life than they did and often point to education as a key component in making this happen.

It is true that we have, at times, faced some resistance to our Girls’ Education program, a program focused on ensuring that girls remain in school through the end of secondary school. Educating girls and women is widely acknowledged as the most powerful and effective way to address global poverty. Women who finish secondary school earn more money, have smaller, healthier families, and are more likely to educate their own

children—breaking the cycle of illiteracy in one generation. However, despite this reality, the barriers to education that girls in the developing world face go far beyond simple economics—cultural bias, tradition and safety concerns often stand in the way. Thus, we continue to work closely with parents and communities to ensure that they understand, and are comfortable with, how our Girls’ Education program works.

***What are the primary age groups you work with? Do you think there is an age at which children need to be reached—where intervention is necessary?***

Our literacy program operates in primary schools, so for most countries, this is grades 1 through 5 or 6. For our Girls’ Education program, we work with our scholars through the completion of secondary school or 12th grade. It is never too early nor too late to reach a child. There is always value in supporting a child to gain an education and help them reach their full potential in life.

***How do you see Room to Read growing in the future?***

The short answer is “much more of the same,” as we feel confident we are having a profound impact in the communities where we work and that more communities that could benefit from Room to Read working in their schools! It will be important to ensure that future growth is consistent with improving the quality, and deepening the impact, of our program. The world needs a stronger focus on education as a cornerstone solution to solving other global issues, so there is no lack of opportunities.

**REVIEW**

# The Children Who Feed America

Review by Annie Bergman, *World Ark* senior writer

There's something you may not know about that package of strawberries or tomatoes you just picked up at the grocery store. A migrant child farmworker may have sacrificed his or her health and education to get it to you.

A new documentary directed by U. Roberto Romano and produced by Eva Longoria, *The Harvest/La Cosecha* follows Zulema Lopez, 12, Perla Sanchez, 14, and Victor Huapilla, 16, to show the toll migrant farm labor takes on the children tasked with getting food to our plates.

The film presents the unpleasant reality that the United States is home to 400,000 children aged 12 and younger who work up to 14 hours a day, seven days a week, picking crops. The film becomes progressively more upsetting as it reveals that migrant children work in 48 states in America and receive no minimum wage or overtime pay.

That the migrant lifestyle has robbed the children of a childhood becomes evident when Zulema's mother admits her daughter has been working in the fields since she was 7. Victor says he went to work to support his family at 8.

The images and stories in the film breed a sense of disbelief, an impulse to deny. But the film forces the audience to confront the unconscionable legal reality: A key agricultural labor law allowing children to work in these conditions hasn't changed significantly in more than 70 years and now keeps these families in a cycle of poverty nearly impossible to overcome.

The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) of 1938 outlines standards for youth employment. For youth working in agricultural jobs, those standards are far different than for those working non-agricultural jobs.

The law stipulates that youth aged 12-13 "may work outside of school hours in non-hazardous jobs on farms that also



**The Harvest/La Cosecha**  
Film by U. Roberto Romano  
Cinema Libre Studio, 2011

employ their parent(s) or with written parental consent," no matter that the Department of Agriculture has indicated agriculture as the most hazardous occupation for child workers in the U.S.

The Fair Labor Standards Act offers virtually no protection for youth in agriculture older than 13. Perla and Victor can work without parental consent, as they are 14 and 16 respectively. At 16, Victor can work any farm job at any time, hazardous or not, in school hours or out. In an especially maddening scene of the documentary, Victor talks about the day he started noticing his skin peeling off, the result of working around chemicals meant to keep our foods pest-free.

But the Act was written in 1938 when school hours and the agricultural sector were vastly different. Children often took time off from classes to work on family farms, and in some areas of the country, schools closed during harvests.

Now, when those practices are far less common, migrants can't afford to finish a school year. Not when the average family makes \$17,500 a year from picking crops six months at a time.

It's clear that the film was produced with the end goal of changing this legislation. A quick look at the film's website has "Contact Congress" as the first form of action to take.

Changes to the Fair Labor Standards Act have been proposed time and again, most recently in June 2011. The Children's Act for Responsible Employment (CARE) seeks to raise labor standards for child farmworkers to the level of those for children outside the agricultural industry.

If legislation like the Children's Act for Responsible Employment passed, it would certainly help. But it wouldn't go far enough. In one scene Zulema explains that she works under the name of her mother's friend. There would be loop-



holes in the law, and children would still be in the fields.

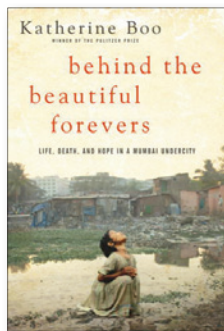
In October 2011, the Department of Labor looked to revise the Child Labor in Agriculture regulations in a way that would offer the protections that other employed children get to children working in agriculture. A public commenting period was opened for approximately three months. The Labor Department offered no date when a decision could be expected, and no promises that any changes to the Fair Labor Standards Act would come out of the public commenting period.

At press time, no decision had been reached.

After more than an hour with these three children, the film closes with successful adults who were once child migrant workers themselves. That the film provides some hope is nice, thought it's oddly juxtaposed after a scene in which a 12-year-old admits she has no dreams, and likely won't even accomplish the smallest goals she may set for herself.

While *The Harvest/La Cosecha* isn't an easy film to watch, it's imperative that more Americans become aware that their food is harvested at the expense of young peoples' health and education. Even if it won't make future shopping trips any easier.

## NEW AND NOTEWORTHY

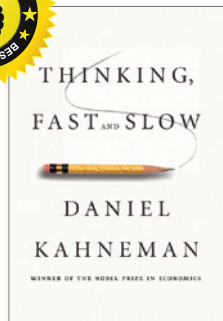


**Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity**  
By Katherine Boo  
Random House Inc., 2012

A Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist chronicles the striving and disappointments of two families over the course of four years in the Mumbai slum of Annawadi.

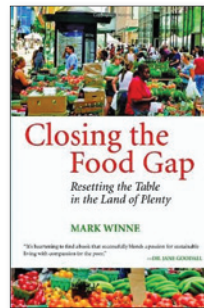
**Thinking, Fast and Slow**  
By Daniel Kahneman  
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011

A deeper dive into the intersection between psychology and economics, Kahneman's work has upended the neo-liberal micro-economic assumption of total rational behavior on the part of economic actors.

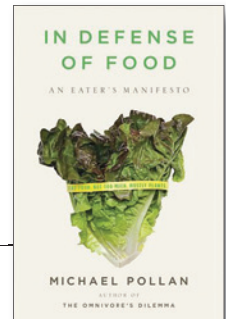


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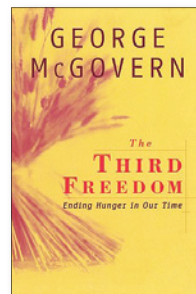
# Food and Nutrition in the U.S.



**Closing the Food Gap: Resetting the Table in the Land of Plenty**  
By Mark Winne



**In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto**  
By Michael Pollan

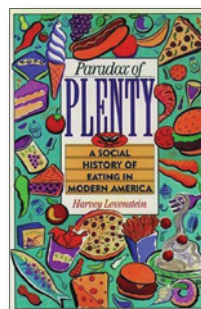


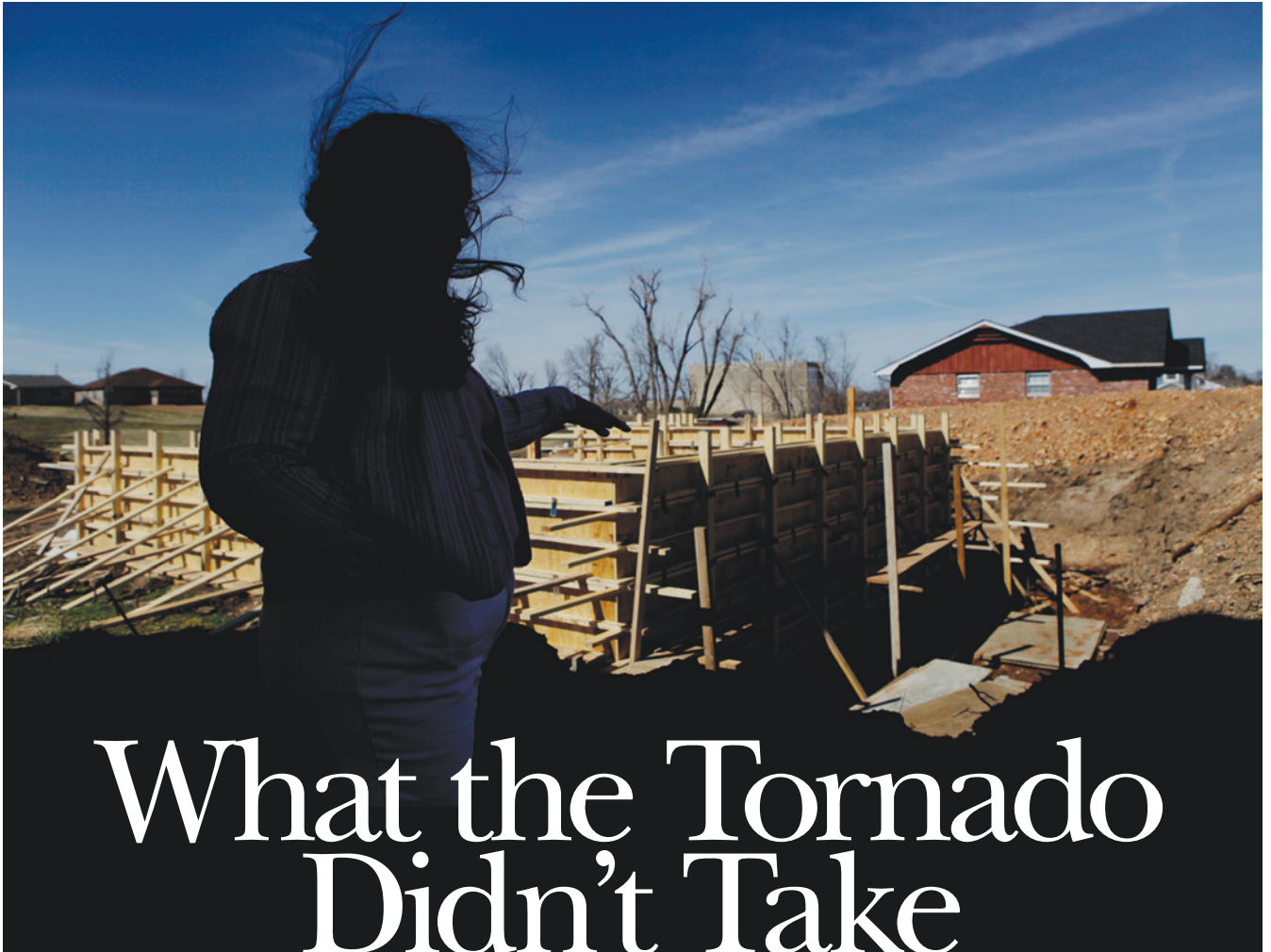
**The Third Freedom: Ending Hunger in Our Time**  
By George McGovern

**All You Can Eat: How Hungry is America?**  
By Joel Berg



**Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America, Revised Edition (California Studies in Food and Culture)**  
By Harvey Levenstein





# What the Tornado Didn't Take

By Annie Bergman, *World Ark* senior writer

Photos by Russell Powell

JOPLIN, Mo.—One year after the May 22, 2011, tornado destroyed more than a quarter of this southwest Missouri town of 50,000, the nearly 60-member congregation of St. James United Methodist Church is still displaced.

The tightly knit group meets each Sunday morning and Wednesday evening to worship in an old title company building about 10 blocks from where their church once stood.

Inside the conference-room-turned-sanctuary, the crosses may be donated, the chairs may be fold-out, but the storm that took so much from these people couldn't take at least one thing: their giving spirit.

If anything, it helped fortify it, said church member Joanne Wills, 81.

“Right now everybody is so helpful and giving, and you just feel like ‘I’ve been given so much I just need to give some back.’”



The E-F5 tornado was the deadliest storm to hit the United States in more than 50 years, killing 160 people, including one member of St. James. It left a scar six miles long and more than a mile wide through Joplin, leveling more than 8,000 homes.

Rebuilding has been slow. The city imposed a two-month building moratorium immediately following the tornado so the removal of the tons of debris left in the storm's wake wouldn't be interrupted.

While most of that debris is now gone, the wide swath that the tornado cut through the town separates the north side of town from the south. Housing foundations are the lone identifiers of former residential neighborhoods. In some places, concrete steps lead where no door waits.

On 20th Street in the heart of the “red zone,” the St. James parking lot paves the way to an empty plot scattered with rocks.

“I’ve had churches damaged several times, but never destroyed,” St. James Rev. Tommy Freeman said. “I’ve never experienced anything like this for myself, for the church, for the people in the church, for the community. It is absolutely devastating, and unless you experienced it, it is almost impossible to describe.”



Freeman, 75, was on a cruise on the day the tornado destroyed his church. When he got the call that St. James was in the storm’s path, he disembarked immediately to fly home. “When I saw it I just broke down and wept,” he said.

The pastor immediately began searching for a new place for his members, even holding services in the base-

ment of his home a week after the storm. The tiny St. James congregation then moved into a conference hall at the Christ Community Methodist Church until finding their new temporary home in August.

It wasn’t ideal, Freeman said. “We really had no identity at the other church. We were meeting in their conference room, so even though you’re at another church you have no identity. That’s their congregation.”



The May 22, 2011, tornado destroyed much of Joplin, including Diane Sadler’s home (previous page). St. James United Methodist Church was also destroyed (above), and the congregation now meets in a temporary spot 10 blocks from their former church. Rev. Tommy Freeman sits with Sarah Sparks, 4, (left) during the children’s sermon at the March 4, 2012, service. A cross salvaged from the destroyed church hangs above them.

## HEIFER SPIRIT

### Giving Resources, Giving Self

Diane Sadler, 51, the church's treasurer, whose home was destroyed by the storm, said losing the church building on top of losing her home was an especially hard blow.

"When I was walking around that very first day [after the tornado], I knew the church was going to be gone. It wasn't until I crested a hill that I saw not only was the church gone, but that I could see clear to Duquesne," a suburb four miles east of the church.

But the tornado has allowed the already close congregation to forge deeper bonds, said member Beverly Young, 75.

"The tornado brought everybody closer," Young said. "So many same things happened to so many of us. If you didn't have to rebuild or find another place to live, then you had to remodel because it was damaged."



Freeman came to St. James eight years ago. A missions-minded minister, he brought with him the idea for the St. James congregation to fund special projects. It's something this congregation embraced, he said.



*Sadler stands among construction materials where her new home is being built (above), while Joanne Wills and her grandson, Donnie, take a break from moving into Wills' new home in a neighborhood that was leveled by the storm (right).*

"Just because we're small doesn't mean we can't do other things for the Lord. I emphasized missions and it took hold. It just caught on," Freeman said.

Each year Freeman has been there, the congregation met their goal to raise at least \$5,000 for either Heifer International, The PET® Project of Columbia, Mo., or a Sedalia, Missouri-based charity, Festival of Sharing. PET, which stands for personal energy transportation, provides mobility devices to people who have lost the use of their legs due to polio, landmines and other injuries or birth defects. The Festival of Sharing brings together people of different denominations to aid those suffering from hunger, poverty, crisis and injustice.

Heifer became part of the rotation after Freeman introduced the organization to his congregation. "We had a man in our church that liked Heifer, so it just kind of became one of the mission projects. Another man said, 'Why don't we just do an Ark?' I said 'Do you know how much an Ark is? It's \$5,000!' So we did and we've been doing it now for five years. And we always meet the goal," Freeman said.

Amidst the chaos of a year defined by loss, St. James





*Freeman visits the site where St. Mary's Catholic Church once stood. The cross in the background became the symbol for the devastated town, and the site became a rallying spot for many.*

members not only gave enough to pay the church's apportionments—something Freeman's congregations have never failed to do in his 40 years of ministry—they exceeded their goal for Heifer by more than \$100 just six months after the deadly storm demolished the church and the homes of about one-fifth of the congregation.

The members never thought twice about giving, even when they could have used the money for their own needs, Freeman said.

"We're not a rich church, but what I've learned is you can't out-give the Lord, and benefits will come back to you for doing it," Freeman said. "Don't look at the dollars, look at what you're doing for someone else."

Sadler said they've taken Freeman's message to heart. And, she said, the tornado even put the congregation in a unique position to give.

"We didn't have our normal utility expenses, so really we were in a better position than we normally would have been even though some members were coming and some weren't," she said.

Plus, Sadler said the knowledge that gifts to Heifer go to making others self-reliant resonated with the church after so many members lost their own possessions.



Though the past year has been a difficult one for St. James, the congregation is hopeful about its future.

Wills has finished the construction of her home, the first St. James member to do so, and has moved in. Sadler's home is under construction, and she hopes she can move in by the end of the summer—the same projected finish date for the church.

And while this year isn't the year for funds to come to Heifer, the congregation is already more than halfway to its goal of \$5,000 for PET, and they're looking forward to giving to Heifer again in 2013.

Plans for a new church are drawn up and awaiting approval by the Methodist Church. Their new church home will be smaller than what they're used to at 10,560 square feet, but it will be nicer than the last, Freeman said.

"It's going to be a beautiful church," he said. "There will be some stained glass windows. We're going to have valet parking for seniors, and hopefully we'll get people with children joining. We're looking forward to it." ■

*For information on how your congregation can get involved with Heifer, visit [www.heifer.org/congregations](http://www.heifer.org/congregations).*

# Let's Make Some Noise for Susan Sarandon!

Actress Eva Amurri Martino and her mother, both loyal Heifer supporters, visit women farmers in Cambodia.

By Allison Stephens,  
Heifer International public relations manager

Susan Sarandon, the Oscar-winning actress famous for her enduring, endearing and sassy roles in such movies as *Dead Man Walking*, *Bull Durham*, *Thelma & Louise* and *Stepmom* has gracefully dealt with plenty of paparazzi-related chaos and noise in her five decades of stardom.

But on a recent trip to visit Heifer International's work in Cambodia, she was up against a force she had never before faced—a deafening chorus of squealing pigs.

"The sound of the pigs was tremendous," Sarandon said. "They were so loud and there were so many and all (were) adorned with flower wreaths."

Sarandon and her daughter, actress Eva Amurri Martino, traveled thousands of miles to see Heifer's life-changing work with their own eyes. They were in Cambodia for their first visit to the country as part of a *Conde Nast Traveler* magazine feature on Sarandon available in newsstands this September.

Mother and daughter are both passionate and dedicated supporters of Heifer International and were excited to attend a Passing on the Gift ceremony in the northern village of Anlong Sar Pagoda and to visit with the Women Rice Bank group in the Preah Net Preah District.

"I find the POG ceremony most interesting because many of the people don't know each other and the giving and receiving of the animals bonds the community and oftentimes forges new relationships where before they didn't know each other," Sarandon said.



Susan Sarandon and Eva Amurri Martino with Sok Soeun, a member of the Women's Prosperity Group.

Sarandon said the inclusion of health education for families in Heifer training sessions also made an impression on her. While participants learn how to care for their animals, they're also studying how to improve their own nutrition and well-being.

Incorporating lessons related to clean water, hygiene, sanitation and nutrition in the projects helps families change risky practices and improve their overall health, said Keang Keo, Heifer Cambodia director.

"Project families have improved sanitation and have adopted good hygiene practices," Keo said. "They keep the environment around their house clean, washing hands with soap, boiling drinking water, building latrines, and eating healthier food often from their home gardens and animals raised."

As a result, they spend less money on health care and have more left for their children's education.

Sarandon and Amurri Martino got some tips on rice farming from Heifer participants, and Amurri Martino even tried her hand at harvesting.

When asked why she so passionately believes in Heifer's mission, Sarandon responded, "Heifer's model is simple, well thought through and a well-executed premise; it doesn't take a lot of explanation. Heifer is clearly making a difference to the lives of so many families."

"When looking at charities to support, I'm hesitant to give to a group when the gift is vague. Heifer (International) is clear and the impact is real and almost immediate." ■

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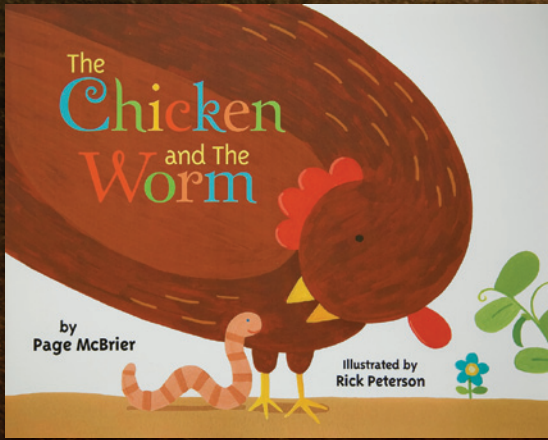


**HEIFER CHENILLE BALLCAP**

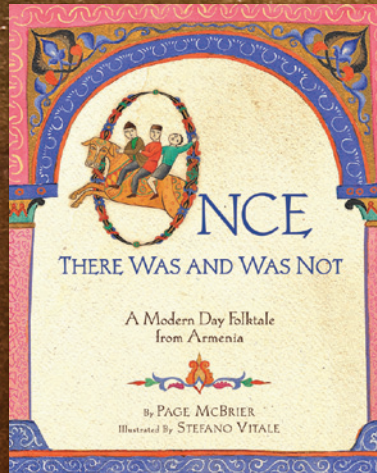
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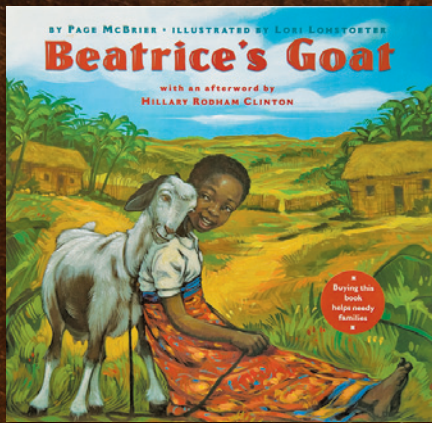
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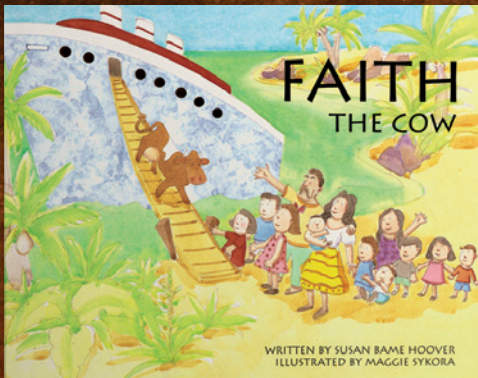
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PHOTO BY JENNA GOLSTROM

# Heifer Ranch Experience Gives Students New Perspective

By Annie Bergman, *World Ark* senior writer

Students at Polaris Expeditionary Learning School in Fort Collins, Colo., know a thing or two about taking trips as part of their school’s curriculum. But for the 16 high schoolers who spent a week at Heifer Ranch in Perryville, Ark., that trip took on an entirely new meaning.

The school does just what its name implies: follows the expeditionary learning model to get kids outside of the classroom for real-world lessons, said Social Studies Department Chair Chris Boyle.

Trips are typically one week long and happen three times a year. Trip experiences range from reintroducing wolves in Yellowstone National Park, studying marine biology in Keno Bay, Mexico and backpacking in the Grand Canyon to studying art history in France.

Boyle said that school counselor Rhae Reiker started

looking into taking students to Heifer Ranch several years ago. Reiker and Boyle agreed that the programs offered there would be a perfect fit for the Polaris students.

“Heifer is an outstanding development organization that I was familiar with and I thought such a simulation would be a perfect and unique experience to challenge our students,” Boyle said.

Autumn 2011 was the third trip the Polaris Expeditionary School took to the Ranch. The students and their three adult chaperones, which included Boyle and Reiker, participated in a four-night experience in the Global Village which places participants in living situations similar to those faced by Heifer project participants around the world.

The students were divided into groups and given their country, either lower Mozambique, upper Mozambique or Tibet, for the next four days. Each group was given

meager resources including food, utensils and firewood and had to learn how to pull together to make it through the week.

Boyle said the program pushed the students in ways other expeditions have not. He noticed changes when the students returned to school in Colorado.

“Students have continued to be deeply reflective about their new understanding of people living in poverty all over the world,” Boyle said. “I am very proud of the conversations they have had with friends and family about poverty and how humans affect and create poverty and their desire to elicit change through service and the education of others.”

Student Cassie Mason, 17, said the trip was harder for her because of the simulation of a life of poverty. “All the other adventure trips I took were more recreational based. The trip to the Ranch didn’t have any recreation at all. We were living real lives, just not our normal lives. The Heifer trip really opened my mind to other cultures and the actual experience of poverty.”

Jenna Goldstrom, 14, echoed Mason’s statements.

“It was much more enriching and experiential than any previous trip I have taken with Polaris. It also required a level of dedication, maturity, perseverance and adaptation that I have never in my life had to tackle, and it was nerve racking, frightening and intimidating to say the least. It’s also the best trip I’ve ever taken,” she said.

Such a positive experience means more Polaris ELS groups will be coming to the Ranch, Boyle said.

“This trip has gained legendary status amongst the Polaris community and the word has quickly spread about what a powerful and impactful experience it was. Polaris students are very excited about the trip, and we will have no shortage of students, staff and parents interested in participating,” he said. ■



PHOTO BY MORAN SMITHWICK

**Polaris Expeditionary Learning students in the Tibet house graze their goats (opposite) while others cook a meal of corn grits.**



## Learning Centers

Heifer’s Learning Centers provide interactive programs and exhibits showcasing Heifer’s model for sustainable development for schools, congregations, youth organizations, families and individuals. Programs are offered throughout the year and range from a few hours to five nights. Learn more at [www.heifer.org/visit](http://www.heifer.org/visit).

## Contact Information

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**—Matilde Condori**

Matilde Condori, daughter Delia, and husband Mario Vila. They live in Frasquia, Bolivia, at nearly 14,000 feet in the Andes mountains. *For more on mothers who work for a better life for their children, see Pages 28-35.*

Photo by Geoff Oliver Bugbee

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