in this issue:  ECHO appoints new CEO • partnership in agricultural extension • tire gardens in Zambia • South Africa and beyond • intern spotlight: Alyssa Barrett
Our national celebration of Thanksgiving is just around the corner – yes, another year is flying by!

When I think about “Thanksgiving”, I am reminded of the words from the Apostle Paul that he knew what it was to live with plenty, as well as in need, and in either situation to be content. (Phil. 4:12)

In many ways, the last months have been a “season of plenty” in the life and work of ECHO.

• We are enjoying an abundance of opportunities to serve and extend our impact here in the U.S. and around the world.
• We have been encouraged by evidence of growing impact and many personal notes of thanks for how ECHO’s trainings and resources have made a difference in families and communities all around the world.
• We have been blessed with financial support—gifts large and small—that have fueled our outreach and enlarged our capacity.
• Our global staff has experienced a renewed freedom, joy, and sense of purpose in the midst of very demanding work.

While all of this is important and legitimate cause for thanksgiving, we also live with a deep awareness that millions and millions of people around the world do not know this kind of abundance.

Surely this is not the way God intends for things to be! God has done his part to provide the potential to produce sufficient food, adequate nutrition, necessary income and meaning in work. Yet so many people do not experience the adequacy of God’s provision.

Many of the plants, practices, and technologies that ECHO shares are practical ways of addressing these ‘wants’—restoring depleted soils, improving children’s nutrition, compensating for weather changes, and adding value to plant and animal production. By God’s grace we are privileged to see tangible impact! In this issue of ECHO News you can read about some of this impact.

So this Thanksgiving season, we invite you to give thanks with us for:

• the difference that ECHO has made in the lives of hundreds of thousands of people so far this year; and,
• the privilege we have to be a channel through which additional hundreds of thousands of people can come to know the grace, goodness, and provision of God in their lives.

Among ECHO’s global staff, our thanksgiving includes YOU because the “difference” that ECHO has been able to make is possible through your participation AND the daunting privilege we have for the future is a collective challenge that God has placed before all of us together.

As you read this issue of ECHO News and then share it with a friend, please join us in thanksgiving for what has been possible and all that remains possible as we work together so that more families will know what it means to live with plenty —because we are “blessed to be a blessing”.

With Gratitude,
David Erickson, President/CEO
ECHO Appoints New CEO

On October 23, 2015, the Board of Directors of ECHO unanimously voted to appoint David Erickson as President and Chief Executive Officer.

David recently served as Interim President/CEO for five months before accepting the position. For the past five years, David has led ECHO’s international engagement and strategic advancement of Regional Impact Centers in Asia and Africa as Chief Organizational Development Officer.

David has nearly 30 years of executive leadership experience including 10 years leading international operations of development organizations. David earned his Master’s in Public Policy from Harvard University and undergraduate degrees from the University of Minnesota. He is married to Jennifer and they have two children and three grandchildren.

Please join us in thanking God for David and supporting him in prayer as he leads ECHO into the future.
Partnership in Ag Extension

ECHO Publishes MEAS Ag Extension Research Summaries

Since ECHO’s beginnings, partnerships with like-minded organizations have always been part of our core DNA. These relationships allow us to do incredibly more than we could ever do ourselves. Currently, ECHO is working with the University of Illinois, Champagne-Urbana through a program called MEAS (Modernizing Extension and Advisory Systems).

Led by the University of Illinois and granted by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), MEAS aims to promote and assist in the modernization of rural extension and advisory services worldwide.

So what is agricultural extension? ECHO defines it as the application of research and new knowledge to agricultural practices through farmer education. It can take many forms. Many governments offer agricultural extension programs but too often accessibility to the resources is limited, especially in rural areas. Missionaries, development workers, and community leaders can provide agricultural extension as well, filling the gap for the small-scale farmers who can benefit greatly from the improved knowledge.

ECHO’s network is strong and growing, helping us to better assist MEAS and myriad other partners as we work together, with you, to reduce hunger and poverty.

Part of the MEAS mission is to “modernize” the extension systems that exist currently, helping to more effectively reach and assist small-scale farmers around the world. Modernizing

Photos courtesy of Brian Flanagan
extension includes ensuring gender access and equality, teaching best practices, updating communication tools, and building opportunities to reach global markets.

To highlight modern and effective approaches to agricultural extension, the MEAS team—including various universities and technical assistance groups—is collaboratively producing resources such as training modules and technical notes. These scholarly articles, case studies, and best practices focus on lessons learned about extension.

But what good are these documents and articles if they are not used and implemented by trainers around the world?

Recognizing the global reach of ECHOcommunity.org, its capacity to disseminate technical information for the benefit of smallholder farmers, and ECHO’s ministry as a whole, MEAS partnered with ECHO to share these resources from its website, http://www.meas-extension.org. So far, 12 well-researched, scholarly documents from the MEAS website have been summarized, simplified for easier understanding and sharing, and customized to better resonate with those working to equip farmers. These documents are now available to ECHO’s growing network of development workers with references to the original material when someone is ready to dig deeper.

Because of your support, ECHO is able to take this valuable content, make it easy to use and share, and distribute both styles of information through our unique network of over 9,200 active members from 160 countries.

This partnership represents the power and future of ECHOcommunity.org. These documents are the first set of materials fully represented in our new modern toolset that allows visitors to read, rate, comment, find related materials, and download. Not only are we able to disseminate the content in this user-friendly format, we also measure interest in different topics by region and language. This will help us prioritize subjects to publish and translate in the future.

And it doesn’t end there. ECHO’s network is strong and growing, helping us to better assist MEAS and myriad other partners as we work together, with you, to reduce hunger and poverty around the world.

ECHO connections in MEAS Consortium

One of the MEAS documents, The Current and Future Roles of Small Farm Resource Centers in Extension and Advisory Services, shares the findings of a study, conducted by ECHO and Penn State University staff, regarding the effectiveness of Small Farm Resource Centers in Southeast Asia.

Another, Agriculture Extension with Community-Level Workers, was developed by Brian Flanagan, past Intern and current Intern Manager for ECHO. This paper is based on best practices derived from a compilation of studies focused on community health worker and community animal health worker programs.
Coffee is quickly gaining popularity in Asia where tea has always been the drink of choice. Coffee is widely grown by highland farmers in Thailand apart from traditional crops of rice, vegetables, and beans. The altitude of the Northern Thailand is suitable to grow Arabica coffee, which has greater value per kilogram than the traditionally grown Robusta coffee. Because growing Arabica coffee is still somewhat of a new practice in Northern Thailand, most of the farmers do not know how to process the coffee and are unaware of their own coffee’s quality and value. They rely mostly on the honesty of middlemen with the hope of getting a fair price.

“Development of coffee knowledge and skills amongst coffee growers is a key factor to not being taken advantage of,” said Lee Ayu Chuepa, founder of Akha Ama Coffee.

Lee Ayu Chuepa started Akha Ama Coffee to help his village reach a global market and build their livelihoods. Lee taught a workshop at ECHO’s Asia Agriculture and Community Development Conference in October.

In 2007, 14 Akha families of Mae Jantai village, together with Lee, began “Akha Ama Coffee”. Instead of selling the green beans to middlemen for a low price, the families decided to process and market the coffee themselves, ensuring a better price for their product. Lee organizes training events and continues to equip the farmers of Akha Ama Coffee with knowledge and skills to improve their livelihoods.

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At the 2015 ECHO Asia Agriculture & Community Development Conference in October, coffee development was one of the highlights of our plenary sessions. Coffee expert, Samuel Gurel, who has been involved in all aspects of the coffee industry for the past 10 years and has been on the judging committees of several barista competitions, spoke about the “WHY” behind coffee development. In preparation for the ECHO conference, Samuel shared with ECHO that the reason he invests his time developing coffee is because he really believes that it improves lives. On the last day of the conference, Lee Ayu Chuepa of Akha Ama Coffee hosted a coffee workshop as one of the ECHO Asia post conference tours. This year’s post conference topics included daily cooperation, agroforestry, bio-pest control, SRI, mushroom farming, vermiculture, and coffee production.

As coffee drinking grows in popularity in Asia, ECHO will continue to support the farmers to follow the trends, add value, and improve their knowledge through training and networking activities.
My husband and I were introduced to ECHO last year when we visited friends in Florida. We came away energized and excited about application possibilities in Zambia where we support three schools for orphans and vulnerable children with a total enrollment of over 900.

We introduced the idea of tire gardens in January 2015 and saw the results in June 2015. Wow! Community members had never heard of tire gardens before and confessed in June that they “thought it was a joke.” They planted the tire gardens as we suggested but, to hedge their bets, planted a “real” garden nearby. They were totally amazed at the difference between the two! Not only did the tire gardens require less work, less soil, and less water, they far outproduced the gardens planted directly in the ground.

Using the vegetable seeds ECHO gave us, they now grow sufficient greens to provide a serving to 300 children once a week. The women in charge of the gardens are subsequently planting tire gardens at their individual homes (the idea is going viral!) and also teaching gardening skills to the orphans.

They are also successfully growing Moringa trees and using the leaves as a food supplement for the children. In June, all of the children planted Moringa seeds in egg cartons at school with a plan to take a seedling home after it sprouts. We’ll see how that program matured next trip.

Thanks so much, ECHO, for sparking new nutritional programs in Zambia.
Three replica homes were built this summer representing Asia, Africa, and the Americas in ECHO’s Appropriate Technology Experience.
Spreading The Word

ECHO Asia Agricultural Program Manager Boonsong Thansrithong planned and implemented an SRI workshop in August, with 15 participants from four organizations, to give participants the background theory and the opportunity to practice SRI techniques hands-on.

Networking Across Asia

198 participants from 20 countries attended the 2015 ECHO Asia Agriculture & Community Development Conference in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Expanding the ECHO Network

Garden Manager Promesse installed roadside “keyhole” kitchen gardens at the ECHO West Africa Impact Center in Ouagadougou.

Left: ECHO East Africa trainer Venance Mollel explains to farmers how jackbean, a green manure/cover crop, provides the highest quantity of nitrogen per hectare at the Tanzanian Nanenane Show. Right: Even children got in on the fun, learning about ECHO water hauling innovations at the Tanzanian Agricultural Society Organization (TASO) Fair, held in Arusha in August.
To summarize ECHO’s final year of research in South Africa, I sat down with Dr. Tim Motis, each of us enjoying a hot cup of coffee. Though we work on the same plot of land at ECHO’s Florida campus, Dr. Motis’ tasks performing, analyzing, and validating ECHO’s research programs keep him quite busy.

DF: Thanks for your time today, Dr. Motis. We want to celebrate with you the completion of ECHO’s largest research project ever. Looking back, can you explain the overall goals of the project?

TM: Sure. From the beginning, we shared a common concern with the Howard G. Buffett Foundation (HGBF) for farmers in Africa who struggle to grow crops year after year on degraded soils. Farmers need low-cost options for growing their crops while sustaining their soils. With that in mind, our overall goal was to explore how best to integrate tropical legumes into cropping systems typical of sub-Saharan Africa. Tropical legumes have been described by some as the best hope for Africa’s soils. With that in mind, our overall goal was to explore how best to integrate tropical legumes into cropping systems typical of sub-Saharan Africa. Tropical legumes have been described by some as the best hope for Africa’s soils. They put nitrogen back into the ground while also producing impressive amounts of organic material. We were able to carry out the research through generous funding from the HGBF, as well as the use of their research farm in South Africa.

DF: What an exciting endeavor. Had ECHO done anything like this before?

TM: Not on this scale. We’ve done a number of small trials on the Global Farm in Florida over the years which gave us valuable foundational experience in the use of tropical legumes. In Florida, though, we get quite a bit more rainfall than in semi-arid parts of Africa. It was significant, then, that we were able to test these crops in South Africa where we not only had poor soils but also the dry conditions. Both of those criteria gave us field conditions with key similarities to the realities farmers face in drier regions of Africa.

DF: It sounds like you had a great team on the project? Who all was involved?

TM: We really appreciated all of the HGBF staff at the research station who supported our work in so many ways; from maintaining facilities and equipment to helping our staff know where to buy groceries. We also had a great team of ECHO staff each year who were willing to take a year or two of their lives to live in a pretty isolated area and work with me in coordinating the trials. They also did a great job of supervising and working alongside a wonderful team of day workers. We are also incredibly thankful to God for this opportunity.
DF: Personally, what was your favorite moment on the Ukulima farm?

TM: On my last trip to South Africa, I got to see the research plots after the maize had been harvested and the plants were “drying down”. Looking at one of our no-legume control plots, all that was there were just the brown maize plants and bare soil underneath. Then I looked at a plot where lablab had been planted with the maize. The lablab had formed a dense, green, living mulch that completely covered the soil. Seeing the stark contrast at that moment made me appreciate ECHO’s emphasis on hunger-related options. Heading into the dry season, a farmer’s options are so much greater with that legume present. The farmer could use the vines for cattle feed, or maybe even sell some to other farmers needing something to feed their animals. Another option would be to harvest the beans for an added food source. The farmer could leave some of the vines on the field to decompose and boost organic matter. It is one thing to know these things intellectually. I appreciated them so much more after seeing the results first-hand in the field.

DF: We are incredibly thankful for the Howard G. Buffett Foundation for funding this research project and equipping ECHO to do the research that is so needed around the world. So, what does the future hold for the results of your research?

TM: We have already written about some of the findings in five issues of ECHO Development Notes, a quarterly agriculture bulletin that goes out to our network of agriculture development workers. We look forward to doing more of that in the future. We also want to publish our findings in scientific journals so that the international community can benefit from the research as well. At the moment, I am working on a presentation and a paper that will be presented at an international moringa symposium in the Philippines in November.

Aside from publications, we have presented findings at several ECHO conferences, here in Florida and also in East and West Africa. Beyond that, we are planning some simple follow-up trials, together with key network partners, to help us get a better handle on how tropical legumes perform under varying climatic conditions in Asia and Africa. They will also give us a chance to work more closely with agriculture practitioners in making sure that the benefits of integrating legumes into small-farm cropping systems actually gets communicated to farmers.

DF: We thank you for your time and energy that has gone into this project and can’t wait to share with the ECHO News community the impact that these results have in ECHO’s ministry in the coming years.
Give Christmas Away

“I send these to my daughter and her family. It’s easy and I get to give gifts that represent what’s important to both of us.”  --Marilyn K.

GIVE EXTRA-MEANINGFUL GIFTS THIS CHRISTMAS

Rather than invest in the latest toy or gadget with minimal satisfaction and a limited life-span, through ECHO you can give a transforming gift that will last a lifetime!

Your hard-earned money will reduce hunger and improve lives worldwide and your recipient will have the heartwarming feeling knowing that a gift was made to ECHO in their name! A personalized card will be sent from ECHO to them or you, explaining the gift.

BROWSE ONLINE TO SELECT PERSONAL, MEANINGFUL GIFTS:

echonet.org/giftcatalog
From Our Asia Network:
Fah Mui: Biological S.R.I. Rice Farmer

By Boonsong Thansrithong - ECHO Asia Agriculture Program Manager

Fah Mui is a local farmer and member of the ECHO Asia network. Below she shared her story and experience with System of Rice Intensification, or SRI, a tool promoted throughout the ECHO Asia network as a way to increase farmers’ rice yields and reduce their inputs.

“I am a shop owner, but I don't want to sell chemical products, so most of the products in my shop are biological goods such as Effective Microorganisms and molasses. About six years ago, I found a book about SRI that was translated by the Agriculture Extension branch of McKean Rehabilitation Center (MRC), located in Chiang Mai. I carefully read every single word of the book. I had doubts, and wanted to see if what the book said about SRI was true. I called MRC and I was able to talk with Mr. Sombat, who explained to me as much as he could. After our conversation, I gained much more confidence and wanted to try my own hand at SRI.”

[Note: MRC is a Christian leprosy healing and rehabilitation center that was established by an American missionary over a hundred years ago. The book translator team was comprised of Klaus Prinz, Ratchakorn U-Seang, Sombat Chaleamleamthong and Boonsong Thansrithong and the book was academically vetted by Professor Pruk Yebmantasiri of Chiang Mai University.]

“People used to ask me: ‘You are doing so many things; do you ever feel tired?’ I said, ‘Yes! I do, but every time when I count my money, all of the tiredness completely disappears.’

“At the time I had 36 acres of paddy land in Phayo province, but during that first year, I practiced SRI only on a small 0.4 acre piece of land. It turned out to have a very good yield. So, in my calculation (if nothing went wrong), if I practiced SRI on all 36 acres, I could pay off my debt. Based on this calculation, I practiced SRI on all my land during the second year, but my calculation was proven wrong, as I hadn’t accounted for natural risk. Unfortunately, there was significant flooding all over Thailand that year. My paddy flooded and all of my rice was damaged. Instead of paying off my debt, I acquired more debt. Thankfully, my Singaporean customer came to visit me and was able to help me with a grant.”

“I kept growing rice. I continued in Phayo for another four years and rather than improving, the yearly flooding became worse. Finally, I decided to move north, where I bought six acres of rice paddy land in the Chiang Rai province. I learned from my previous experience with rice-growing, which taught me I shouldn’t use a single method for the entirety of my land, at least not until I became more sure and sufficiently confident in the technique and environment. That first year [in the new location], I planted rice with three different methods in order to test them: the first method used the traditional technique (planting 8-10 older seedlings together with close spacing in the paddy), the second method was a “double transplant” method (prepare the seedlings like SRI in a seedling bed, transplanting them into a special bed in the paddy and then planting the field using the seedlings from the special bed), and the third method was the SRI method (planting single young seedlings, spaced further apart). At the end of the season, it turned out that the yield of the first two methods didn’t even compare with SRI, which was significantly higher. With these results, I bought another six acres (in total I now have twelve acres). In the coming years, I will continue to grow SRI on all twelve acres. As the land has enough water to grow a second crop, I am also able to grow rice using the SRI method through the dry season on six of the acres.”

“This successful application of SRI and biological practices has caused many people to come and visit my paddy. Some are government officers, some are general farmers, and a few are non-Thai (including people from the United States and a professor from Cornell University). People used to ask me: ‘You are doing so many things; do you ever feel tired?’ I said, ‘Yes! I do, but every time when I count my money, all of the tiredness completely disappears.’
My name is Alyssa Barrett, also known here in Florida as Alyssa-ssippi because I was born and raised in Wiggins, Mississippi. I am currently serving as ECHO’s Urban Garden intern. My internship began in January of 2015 and will come to a close in February of 2016. Before coming to ECHO, I acquired a Bachelor’s degree in Agricultural Science and a Master’s degree in Agricultural and Extension Education with a concentration in Leadership, from Mississippi State University.

My reason for choosing ECHO after receiving a Master’s degree is quite simple. I am a big believer in experiential learning and ECHO offered the perfect opportunity to apply school knowledge to real life, but God knew I needed to learn so much more. In the ten months I have been at ECHO, I have learned so much about myself. It has been a wonderful place to live and learn among some of the most Christ-like people I’ve ever met. The staff here amazes me every day with their love for one another. I have been able to devote time to my own personal development while catching ECHO’s heart of serving others through agriculture. I have learned about more plants than I ever thought possible and I have gained a deeper respect for farmers and the daily challenges they face.

My future plans at the moment are to follow God wherever he leads me. Currently, I am looking into a post-internship opportunity ECHO offers with our Regional Impact Centers. Someday as part of my career, I would like to work in a managerial position in an international agricultural organization. I am looking forward to the last five months of my internship with much excitement and am so thankful the Lord saw fit to place me here.
Gary Cooper’s thriving business kept him very busy by day, but each night the thought of doing something about world hunger gnawed away at him. He wrote to missionaries and went on a short-term mission trip to Haiti. One evening in Haiti a package of seeds fell out of a roommate’s luggage, and Gary learned about ECHO’s practice of providing seeds for development workers. He planted those seeds and thus began his practice of supporting the work of others in the field through ECHO’s connections.

“One year I took 100 strawberry plants to a missionary in Belize. I learned how hard development work is the day after we planted them, when we discovered that leaf eater ants had eaten every one of the plants.”

Gary’s experience gave him a keen appreciation for the long-term work and learning that marks the ECHO community.

“I’ve always been interested in helping people by partnering with those who are already working in mission,” said Gary.

“If you want to leave a legacy, receive income from doing so, and know where you’re giving, a planned gift is the way to go,”

Gary likes to participate as his planned gifts impact small-scale farmers around the world through ECHO.

Herbs spice up our lives! This season it’s common to see herbs and spices used in baking and cooking, but did you know they could be used for other things? Here’s how to get the most out of five common herbs and spices this season.

**Cinnamon** can help in relieving indigestion and nausea. The next time you feel sick or overwhelmingly full from a meal, try some cinnamon tea! Just simmer three or four cinnamon sticks in two cups of water and sweeten with a taste of honey.

**Clove**s can freshen the air. Stick some into oranges and place them around the house as decorative air-fresheners.

**Nutmeg** helps digestion, settles tummy aches, and helps you fall asleep. Just add a small pinch of ground nutmeg to a cup of warm ginger tea to help with stomach problems. On nights you can’t fall asleep, heat up some milk and sprinkle in some ground nutmeg.

**Ginger** helps increase circulation and relieves congestion and nausea. Steep one or two teaspoons of freshly grated ginger or ½ teaspoon of powdered ginger in a cup of boiling water for 10 minutes. But beware, ginger can be pretty spicy! You can always make things sweeter with a touch of honey.

**Peppermint** can also be very helpful as it stimulates digestion, eliminates nausea, and helps freshen your breath. If taking after-dinner mints or mint gum isn’t enough, try a cup of freshly brewed mint tea.

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**Five Warm Flavors**

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In Early October, the ECHO Asia staff hosted almost 200 people for the 2015 ECHO Asia Agriculture & Community Development Conference in Chiang Mai, Thailand. (For another photo, see page eight.) Here are some reflections:

“I feel as though I met many very hard working and passionate people who are serving poor farmers throughout Asia. They were very eager for knowledge and even before leaving, were already discussing with one another ways they would implement that new learning, to better minister to agriculturalists. I trust that this knowledge is in the right hands—it’s exciting to be around.”
—Rebecca, ECHO Asia Office Manager

“I saw almost 200 participants from 20 countries! I can’t wait to see how the knowledge they have learned and gained during the conference will help with their work across Asia.”
—Noi, ECHO Asia Communications Coordinator