in this issue: believing in tomorrow: gardens in Bolivia • new at ECHO Florida Africa Youth Award for Agriculture • intern spotlight: Eleni Patitsas
Over and over, as I read through this issue of ECHO News, I am reminded of how relational our work is. Farming involves an intentional relationship with the land and all that is necessary for it to be productive. Equipping farmers, their families, and their communities, is an intensive process of relating to people where they are; recognizing and honoring their challenges and circumstances; encouraging them to open to change and new possibilities.

Seeking to follow Jesus by encouraging reconciliation – in broken relationships with creation, others and with God – is the real work to which we are called. It takes time. It takes intentionality. It takes creativity. It takes wisdom. It takes persistence.

Each of the stories you’re about to read reflect the hope that takes root when our relational work brings reconciliation to the land and in the lives of those we serve. I hope that you are both encouraged and inspired as you read.

We also recognize that you have chosen to be in relationship with us and the mission of ECHO all around the world. Thank you for being intentional toward us! Many of you chose to give generously to ECHO at the end of 2016. Others have already given to our work in the New Year. We are grateful for your encouragement, prayers on our behalf, and giving to sustain and grow our impact among the women, children and men who most need to know the love and grace of our reconciling God.

Blessings on you in this New Year,

David Erickson, President & CEO

P.S. In mid-February, ECHO’s Board of Directors will be considering a new Strategic Plan to guide ECHO’s direction over the next five years. Lots of input, analysis, prayer and reflection has gone into a Plan that boldly builds on ECHO’s 36 years of equipping experience. Please pray for continuing wisdom, courage and discernment – and stay tuned!
Moringa for the World

It’s not every day you see a healthy grove of Moringa trees growing on the backlot of a church property, but that’s just what a church in Cape Coral did to support ECHO’s mission.

Christian Life Fellowship (CLF) in Cape Coral, Florida, expressed a desire to help ECHO by providing a parcel of vacant land that was donated to the church. After discussions between ECHO staff and church leadership, plans were made to plant Moringa trees for seed production. Berms were built, weed cloth laid, irrigation installed, and 30 Moringa oleifera ‘PKM-2’ seedlings were planted on the church’s property.

Many volunteers and ECHO staff members have partnered through the years to weed, maintain the irrigation system, and harvest seeds. But this work is not without reward: two recent seed harvests have provided over six pounds of seeds that were tested for germination, packaged, and offered to our global network on October 25, 2016. Because the trees are in an isolated location, the seed harvested from the plot should maintain the beneficial traits of the ‘PKM-2’ variety of Moringa, which is not available to ECHO from any other source.

What was once very difficult to provide for missionaries and development workers is now plentiful, thanks to your generosity, the partnership of a willing church, and lots of weeding!
The sound of okra frying cracks and sizzles through the humid Bolivian air as high school students prepare their freshly harvested snacks. Carrots, cranberry hibiscus, beets, lemongrass and blue kale are chopped throughout the kitchen. An ECHO water bottle sits nestled on the table among the plates and the harvest.

The commotion is all part of the first “end of semester” harvest celebration for the new agricultural elective class at Santa Cruz Christian Learning Center (SCCLC), a small international Christian high school in Bolivia. Sarah Hinson, a missionary with South America Mission, teaches this class with former ECHO intern Jason Weigner, who pointed Hinson to ECHO.

According to Hinson, the students at SCCLC are not familiar with agriculture due to the large size of their city, which currently has a population of more than one million people. “There is not a lot of country space or areas to plant a garden,” Hinson said.

Hinson came to Bolivia to do university ministry, but plans changed when Hinson was offered a teaching role. Knowing of Hinson’s background in environmental studies, Emily Barlow, the secondary principal at SCCLC, offered Hinson an opportunity to teach a new agricultural elective.

Santa Cruz, Bolivia has a population of more than one million people.
This agriculture elective takes place during the last hour of the school day, lasting around 45 minutes. During this time, Hinson and Weigner teach the students how to build gardens, plant seeds, detect soil health, and manage pests. Many of the plants come from ECHO seeds.

“It is really cool having the freedom while we’re planting just to have open conversation,” Hinson said. One conversation concerned the importance of making wise life decisions based on having a solid view of our value and significance in Christ. “It allowed that student to know that I also see value and importance in him as a person, not just a student and not just someone I’m here to teach.”

For SCCLC’s “Spiritual Emphasis Week” some of Hinson and Weigner’s students took their new gardening skills to Hospital Oncológico, a local cancer hospital. They volunteered in the hospital’s small garden and spent time with patients.

“They want to incorporate it (the gardening class) into other things they are doing,” Hinson said. “I think that is really cool.”

Hinson attended the ECHO Conference in November where she found it helpful to be around other people who are passionate about agriculture and sharing the Gospel.

“When I first entered into missions, I thought I would have to leave my passion for agriculture behind, because I didn’t see how they would work together,” Hinson said. “But being at ECHO and seeing all of these people who were doing agriculture, not just as an entry opportunity, but a way to reach people with a spiritual need as well, was encouraging.”

The class has not only impacted the students taking it, but other students at the school. The second grade classes visited the garden to learn about plants, and the third graders planted cucumbers. The biology teacher also took his class to the garden for hands-on learning. One student in a wood painting class created a sign for the garden even though she had not taken the agricultural elective.

The sign reads, “To Plant a garden is to believe in Tomorrow.”

Next semester, Hinson and Weigner hope to plant “themed” gardens such as a butterfly garden, a pizza garden, or a salsa garden to get the elementary students more involved.

“The Lord has given me a passion for plants and agriculture, but an even greater passion for His Gospel and seeing it transform lives,” Hinson said.
what’s happenin

Boonsong, ECHO Asia’s Agriculture Programs Manager, teaches about using appropriate cookstoves to create biochar.

Special thanks to Moorings Presbyterian Church for the funds for our Global Farm Classroom. Fellowship of Christian Farmers volunteers donated the labor.

#echofightshunger

Follow us on Instagram for pictures of ECHO’s work all around the world. #echofightshunger

Coffee Processing Camp in Thailand

We had a great week in December with a group from over 10 countries at the Coffee Processing Camp. Register at ECHOcommunity.org to learn about future events.
Volunteers Celebrate 70th Anniversary

George and Lollie Peckham celebrated their 70th wedding anniversary with their ECHO family on November 2, 2016. We were blessed to watch some of their actual wedding video and celebrate with cake. A profile of the couple and their selfless service to ECHO was published in a local newspaper.

New at ECHO Florida

ECHO interns gathered for a group photo inside the newly completed Tropical Monsoon Homestead. Come see it for yourself!

2016 Agriculture Conference

The Annual ECHO International Agriculture Conference continues to draw participants who are hungry for the information and networking that ECHO provides. Hands-on afternoon workshops were a highlight of the week. L: Training in fruit tree grafting R: how to create and use a gravity-fed Chapin drip bucket kit to water vegetable plots.
Africa Youth Awards, the continent’s most coveted international recognition for young people, has announced its 2016 winners. Nominations and votes were received from over 145 countries across the world.

Sipasi Olalekan Ayodele is the most recent recipient of the Africa Youth Award for Agriculture. Currently the CEO of L’Afrika Integrated Farms and ProtectOzone in Nigeria, he was nominated for the award based on his implementation of the Foundations for Farming methods, and for innovations at his poultry farm. Using locally available herbal alternatives, he is demonstrating how to avoid the synthetic micronutrients in commercial poultry feed. Contamination in these feed products are linked to nearly a half-million livestock deaths each year. L’Afrika Integrated Farms, and those they have trained, are seeing decreased livestock mortality and improvements in the health and wellbeing of their consumers.

Sipasi shared, “I see agriculture more as a gift of nature, to keep the world active and alive – imagine a world without agriculture, it’s a world in extinction. Every other thing in the world can be seasonal, or occasional. But you need me (a farmer) three times daily, hence agriculture is lucrative.”

Sipasi started farming at 9 years old with just a rooster and a hen given by his grandparents. With careful management, he quickly multiplied his flock into the hundreds. When he moved to Lagos for secondary school he was no longer able to raise chickens, but had not lost his love of animals and livestock management. One of the punishments at school was to work with the pigs and poultry. So, in order to spend more time with the animals, Sipasi would get into trouble on purpose. This activity didn’t lead to academic excellence until his final years at university when he finally got to do some practical, hands-on training and began to amaze his professors. Sipasi now holds a Master’s Degree in Animal Science from the University of Ibadan.

On his way to the ECHO Forum in 2015, Sipasi heard an announcement that the airline would be planting some trees in Ethiopia to combat climate change, and decided that the same needed to be done in his country. “The thought of saving our environment to curb climate change through planting of trees stirred me up as an agriculturalist, said Sipasi.” Upon returning home he volunteered with Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) Nigeria for 13 months and began advocacy campaigns, trainings, and distribution of tree seeds to combat erosion and climate change in rural communities. This led to the founding of ProtectOzone in a bid to “mobilize
Altogether, Sipasi has distributed over 25,000 tree seeds, planted over 850 trees across Nigeria, and trained over 4,000 people in sustainable agricultural practices.

In addition to the 2016 Africa Youth Award for Agriculture, Sipasi has been named an ambassador for the country of Nigeria to the Young African Leaders’ Initiative, an ambassador for Go Green in the City, a Social Innovators Fellow of LEAP Africa, and a Global Shaper of the World Economic Forum, which is described as “the world’s largest youth organization of active citizens influencing their communities positively.”

Sipasi counts his ECHOcommunity active development worker membership to be one of his most valuable titles: “ECHO was the height of my exposure to the benefits of sustainable agriculture; it gave me the very first platform to share my experience with the world during the East Africa Symposium in Arusha.”

Sipasi’s success is not by chance; it came through making informed decisions and being committed to his dreams. Failures are not meant to discourage us, but to build us.

“I looked back and saw how my exposure through ECHOcommunity and the symposiums in East and West Africa spurred me to more action in the agricultural space.”

Meet Sipasi – Watch the Youths of West Africa interview and farm tour on YouTube:
https://www.ECHOnet.org/echo-videos/YOWA

Sipasi will be honored at an awards ceremony during the 2017 Heads of State Summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
Hello ladies and gentlemen, thank you for featuring me in this month’s ECHO Intern Spotlight. I’m touched! My name is Eleni Patitsas, the Mountain Intern. Florida is a step into the unusual for me, as I hail from the emerald forests of Pennsylvania and the wild west of Texas. I graduated from Texas A&M University where I studied Horticulture.

My journey to ECHO and to what lies ahead has been a work in the making! Though I grew up mostly in suburban neighborhoods, I’ve always had this inner desire to be a farmer and be in touch with animals and creation. Some would say that this desire was misplaced, some would say it was destiny! I would sketch out homesteads and pasture designs in my notebooks and on scraps of paper I’d find, and take bites out of leaves I saw to see if they were tasty.

Flashing forward, my love for farming took on new heights and gathered momentum as I was active in my university’s organic student farm, read inspiring books, and sailed around the world aboard a ship with the Semester at Sea program. During my voyage, food and how to care for it crossed over spoken language barriers, befriended strangers, and connected us with everyone we encountered! Following my studies, I worked at a winery in the Texas Hill Country as the assistant vineyard manager. Working with those vines, taught me much about myself and God. Especially how God uniquely, and with the greatest care, prepares each of us to bear much fruit!

At ECHO, I am thrilled to be in touch more deeply with the world of international agriculture. I continue to learn more about myself, the Lord, and those we’re in relation with each day! There is an abundance of shapes and sizes of fruits and trees to explore here. If you aren’t convinced, just take in the view from the mountain top! From conversations I’ve had here, I’ve grown to adore learning about polyculture systems and conservation agriculture in drylands and on hillsides. I greatly appreciate all the grafting and vegetative propagation techniques I am learning. As the mountain intern, I must admit my horizons are being broadened – vertically!

After my ECHO internship, I hope to work in Mediterranean agriculture development and education. With the current economic climate of the region, I believe the importance of agriculture will continue to climb! I also believe with assurance that God is faithful to His people there. Being of Greek heritage, this calling hits very close to home and I hope my efforts will bless the generations to come! Please keep me in your prayers along the way! 🐰
“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”
2 Timothy 4:7

Do you ever wonder what kind of race you’re running?

Tears flowed as I read this letter, penned straight from the heart of a loving daughter who was helping her parents carry their legacy of faith across the finish line.

“This gift comes to you after the sale of my parents’ farm... They designated a percentage of the sale for use in building God’s Kingdom.

Mom and Dad were simple folk who farmed about 55 acres during their entire adult lives. Dad loved the land and did his best to preserve its quality long before the formal study of creation stewardship. The family is now choosing the charities to receive the gifts from the farm. I looked specifically for ones that reflect the work mom and dad cared about, and ECHO was high on my list.”

This family’s legacy is a beautiful example of Paul’s reflections about “keeping the faith” as he neared the end of his life.

It is also an inspiring reminder that finishing the race well requires that you begin with intentionality. The foundation of this legacy was a mom and dad who were intentional about passing on their love for God and His creation to their children.

Building a legacy also requires planning. Yet, statistics show that 55 percent of Americans will die without an estate plan or will.

A common misconception is that wills are only for the wealthy. An estate includes all of the assets left when a person dies, and this often adds up to more than anticipated. Estate plans or wills allow people to designate how their personal property such as vehicles, jewelry and furniture, as well as savings or retirement accounts, will be distributed after their death.

You don’t need a large estate to make a big difference in the lives of the families ECHO serves around the world. To find out how you can advance ECHO’s work by making a planned gift through your will, retirement plan or insurance policy, please contact Amy Wiggins, Donor Stewardship Manager, at 239.567.3309 or awiggins@echonet.org. The legacy you’ll leave tomorrow starts with the plans you make today!

Don’t panic! Have a seat, and let us share with you some tips for caring for your cold-damaged papayas and bananas.

Papayas: If the main central bud on your plant was killed by the cold, you have two options. One, cut the entire plant down and start afresh. Two, cut it down to a height of 2-3 feet. The central trunk will be hollow, so place a coffee can or other barrier over this hole so that water cannot enter the trunk. Several shoots will begin to grow from the trunk. Remove all but the largest three shoots, and your fruit production should resume. If the main central bud is not damaged, remove all the fruit – the plant’s reserves will be used to produce new leaves.

Banana: Examine each plant individually – your course of action will depend on each plant’s stage of growth. 1. A bunch that is nearly mature can be left for a couple of weeks then harvested. 2. A young bunch, far from full development, will never fill out – wait until spring, then cut the plant down. 3. A plant that has not yet flowered can be left until it produces a bunch. At that point, count the leaves – a banana plant needs 4 healthy leaves to fill out a bunch. If there are 4 or more, great! If not, give it the axe. 4. A young plant will continue to grow, but flowering and fruiting will be delayed.

If you can stand unsightly leaves on your banana plants, leave them until the weather warms up – they will provide an insulating barrier against the next cold snap.
New ECHO Ebook available on Amazon


*Fundamentals of Agricultural Development* features technical notes written by experienced practitioners, on development principles and how to think “outside the box.” It also contains insights on research and experimentation, and shares information helpful for selecting suitable crops.

Upcoming ebooks include chapters two and three in each language, which cover practical, project-oriented options for the restoration of unproductive soils and for coping with scarce rainfall.

The ebook (Kindle edition) is available for purchase from Amazon.com for only $4.99. This is an exceptional resource for any current or future missionary working in an agricultural community.