in this issue: starving for knowledge • first workshop in Kathmandu, Nepal shaping America’s future and Tanzania’s fields • intern spotlight: Kelly Wilson
And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.  
Col. 3:17

In mid-June, ECHO’s team leaders from Asia, East Africa, West Africa, and Central America/Caribbean, gathered with our leadership here at ECHO-Florida. It was a great time of sharing, praying and strategizing together. It was also a really important time -- we are launching into our new 5-year Strategic Plan,* and we want to ensure that we are moving forward together, with clarity and wisdom.

As we worked together, I was struck by how different our leaders are from each other. Their origins, backgrounds, nationalities, and path to ECHO, are all dissimilar. Yet each, in their own way, is an extraordinarily effective leader and teacher. In the context of mutual honor and respect, these differences brought added insights and richness.

At the same time, I was aware of the deep qualities that they held in common. Qualities that make them remarkable representatives not just of ECHO, but even more importantly, of Jesus.

- Without exception, these men and women are knowledgeable. They know what they are talking about!
- They are experienced. When they train, they are not only teaching from text-book knowledge, but also from experience born from hands-on engagement. They lead with authority and a real sense of responsibility, careful to offer both direction and support. As they share, they do so from a personal and purposeful faith.
- They are equipped with resources to increase the effectiveness of their training and trouble-shooting, and backed up by a network of other experienced agricultural and development practitioners.

But all of this isn’t enough to be an excellent representative of ECHO, and certainly not of Jesus. A fourth quality is key…and that is attitude. This was captured for me in the feedback we received from a village elder in Burkina Faso. At the end of ECHO’s training he said, “People of the city have no consideration for us when they come to us in the village, but as for you, you have been different. You are so humble and good with us.”

Humility, caring, identifying – these flow from an underlying attitude that makes all the difference! The difference between activity and impact. The difference between simply doing a job and of being a blessing. The difference between being present and representing.

Thank you for joining with ECHO and giving us the privilege of being representatives!

We are grateful!

* ECHO’s new Strategic Plan is available at www.echonet.org/strategic-plan. If you would prefer a printed copy, please just let us know by indicating that on the enclosed envelope – we’ll be happy to send it to you.
ECHO is a global Christian organization that equips people with agricultural resources and skills to reduce hunger and improve the lives of the poor.

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Passing of the Mantle

The Central America/Caribbean Regional Impact Team, the youngest arm of ECHO’s regional outreach, has gained momentum as Brad Ward has led the networking and training in the region since 2014. In June of 2017, Cecilia Gonzalez replaced Brad Ward as the Leader of the team as Brad and Trish Ward move to the mission field in Guatemala and Honduras. Celebrate these recent milestones with us:

• The first issue of Central America/Caribbean Notes, a regional supplement to ECHO Development Notes, was published in April of 2017.

• A green manure cover crop research trial has begun in six locations in the region. This research will help ECHO to better recommend cover crops to network members in Central America, The Caribbean, and across the globe.
Starving for Knowledge

by McKenzie Van Loh | Journalist

David Kusserow couldn’t find the answers. His knees pressed into the soft, fertile soil as he inspected the leaf of a purslane plant, one of the many wild plants Kusserow grew on his own as a missionary kid in West Africa. What started as a fun way to observe and learn from the plants around him led to a dead end of confusion. How can I get this type of seed to germinate? How can I care for this soil? What is the nutritional value of the plant? Most high school boys in his West African farming community didn’t ask questions. They just did the farm work.

When Kusserow asked his friends and family for answers about his plants, every one of them responded in the same way.

“Ehh, I don’t know. We usually don’t think about that kind of thing.”

One day, some of Kusserow’s family friends dug through their shed. They came out with a dusty box of development notes they had used in the past from ECHO. Knowing Kusserow’s interest in plants, they handed the notes to him.

Kusserow read every word as if he were drinking a cold glass of water on a 100 degree day. When he finished, he wanted more, so he found ECHO’s online resources and began to study them, too.

This is a story about how a plant-loving boy became a man who uses his passion for plants to love others. From his roots in West Africa, to the training ground ECHO has provided, Kusserow proves his talents and desires are an important piece toward loving and serving a starving world.
In the summer of 2012, Kusserow took his first trip to Iowa where he would attend Dordt college and begin making his way toward becoming an agronomist.

Dr. Jeff Ploegstra, Kusserow’s botany and plant physiology professor, encouraged Kusserow to attend ECHO’s annual U.S. international agriculture conference during his junior year. Kusserow agreed, trading Dordt’s brown, harvested fields and bare trees for ECHO’s beaming sun, leaf-lined pathways, and ripening mango and avocado trees.

Upon his arrival, Kusserow spoke with Brian Flanagan, ECHO’s intern manager.

According to Flanagan, he would fit in well as an intern. He had previous international experience in West Africa, was interested in working overseas in an arid region of the world and was passionate whenever he conversed about plants.

When Kusserow’s plane returned to the rolling fields of northwest Iowa after the conference, he questioned the direction he wanted to go in agriculture. If he stayed with agronomy, he would have to work in sales or research corn and soybeans. Kusserow didn’t like talking to strangers very much, and research sounded boring. The thought of living and breathing in a tie and dress shoes made Kusserow want to gag. He wanted to feel the residue from the soil on his hands. He wanted to spend his days under the sun wearing a cap and a t-shirt. But most of all, he wanted to make and impact, and ECHO was doing that.

He wanted to feel the residue from the soil on his hands.... But most of all, he wanted to make an impact, and ECHO was doing that.

Today, his tasks range from watering plants, feeding the cows and goats, and giving tours but every day brings new questions and ideas about how agriculture impacts the lives of small-scale farmers around the world.

On top of that, Kusserow manages the Semi-Arid garden under the guidance of Andy Cotarelo, ECHO’s farm manager. Kusserow’s internship is like basic training for agriculture development. He learns and implements farming strategies without worrying about a community depending on him. As he works, agriculture professionals take note of the progress to report new techniques to farmers and urban gardeners in need of them.

Kusserow’s day starts at 7:20 a.m. when he grabs a cup of black coffee to take to his intern meeting. From 8 a.m. to 9 a.m. he does chores with Ashley Crockett, the current rainforest intern. Together they water plants and feed the goats and cows.

David doesn’t know where he will end up, but with his education in agriculture and the hands-on experience from ECHO, he can look past the cracks in the ground and help bring joy to lives that have been parched.
When chores are done, Kusserow moves to the Semi-Arid garden. He takes care of plants such as millet, cassava, and sorghum. Kusserow uses the Zai hole system, a method ECHO encourages in semi-arid climates where holes are dug in nutrient-poor soil and filled with organic matter to boost plant growth.

When Kusserow waters, prunes, and harvests his plants, he imagines the future that may be in store for him. He can see himself standing in a dusty valley with wide open spaces and rocky mountains in the distance. Someday, he would like to live in an arid place in the world. A place where the dirt is parched and the average rainfall is less than 20 inches a year. It’s places like these where it is a challenge for local farm families with limited resources and equipment to grow anything.

Kusserow doesn’t know where he will end up, but with his education in agriculture and the hands on experience from ECHO, he can look past the cracks in the ground and help bring joy to lives that have been parched. He visualizes himself helping communities be productive and sustainable like ECHO has done. Growing plants in a tire or building soil with layers of cardboard have helped farmers in the past, and Kusserow is excited to learn more solutions.

Josué Baya is a farmer in western Burkina Faso, a place that receives less than 30 inches of rain per year. Just like Kusserow, Baya is a learner. In 2010, Baya attended ECHO’s West Africa Networking Forum where he learned farming strategies to try on his own soil. The tall, green corn harvested from Baya’s field attracted attention from the locals. Soon, Baya began to give day-long lessons to 29 local pastors for one dollar each. Later, a local government administrator approached Baya with hopes of using his knowledge to tackle the village’s unemployment problem during the dry season. Soon, the local government proposed plans to build a well, create garden plots, and hire local youth to tend the gardens.

Stories like Baya’s give an example of how Kusserow can see himself making a difference in the future.

“I think we are called to love our neighbor,” Kusserow said. “If my talent is in the area of understanding the plants and the soil, I think a big part of loving my neighbor is to help them grow plants and take care of the soil.”
Rajendra is a school teacher turned farmer with an amazing story. Rajendra is still a teacher and farms on the side, mostly after the school day is over and on his days off. He took over his father’s land, with very little training or agricultural background and has been pushing forward to take what he was given and make it work.

He started with a small piece of land and a couple of dairy cows. Within a few years he formed a dairy cooperative with his neighbors to pool their milk together and transport it all at once to market.

In order to take advantage of the elevation at which his village is located, he also started planting coffee, and has brought in the members of his cooperative to share in his success. They have plans to open a coffee processing station one day. Currently, they are selling their coffee beans to a business in Singapore thanks to Rajendra’s networking skills, and are able to get a much higher price than what the local market would have to offer. The small co-op does have plans to open their own coffee processing station some day.

earthquake struck, bringing much destruction and death. This included members of his cooperative as well as a large number of their dairy cows, many of which were crushed when their barns collapsed on top of them.

The dairy cooperative continues to struggle to get back to its pre-earthquake levels of production as rebuilding homes and other necessities have taken priority.

Recently Rajendra, having a desire to continue his learning and willingness to try new things (traits he has in common with some of the most successful farmers I have ever met) recently discovered Moringa and its myriad of potential benefits. He currently has over 200 seedlings ready to be planted on his farm and eventually onto the farms of his neighbors, with hopes of producing Moringa pills and tablets, which are in high demand and can be quite profitable.

Through his search for more Moringa information and resources, Rajendra found out about our Nepal Agriculture & Community Development Workshop, and immediately registered. He traveled nearly 2 days down from his village in the mountains to attend. He assured me that he had thoroughly enjoyed the workshop and had learned about many new ideas and practices. With what I considered to be one of the highlights of our workshop he told me, in his own words “Today I will return to my home, and everything that I have learned here will tomorrow be known by the 220 members of my cooperative!”
Leading our Regional Impact

Leaders of Impact Centers and Teams gathered in June to learn from one another as we kick off our new Strategic Plan. Please pray for these leaders and their families. L-R Erwin Kinsey, Robert Sanou, Abram Bicksler, and Cecilia Gonzalez.

#echofightshunger

Representatives from the University of South Florida’s Patel College of Global Sustainability came to ECHO-Florida to construct a continuous-flow biogas digester.

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

Tag ECHO and we’ll follow you too!
The West Africa training team has been on the road often the past months hosting multiple trainings during the dry season before farmers have to begin planting. This training in the village of Balinga in Ghana was hosted by the local church. Men and women were encouraged to attend as women are sometimes not included in agricultural training opportunities.

In East Africa, ECHO partnered with the Arusha Technical College to provide a Creative Livelihoods training. Students were taught to solve challenges related to innovation and make their innovation prototypes more attractive. This team is disassembling waste circuit boards to make keychains to sell.

In partnership with Medical Teams International and Shanti Nepal ECHO Asia offered the first ever ECHO training in Kathmandu, Nepal.

ECHO West Africa hosted professionals from Ouagadougou, the Capital City of Burkina Faso for a training on urban gardening. The training focused on the production of compost and liquid fertilizer in urban areas and gardening in small spaces. Please pray that this knowledge will spread quickly to friends and neighbors.
Just a few months into my freshman year of college I boarded a plane to the Dominican Republic for my first cross-cultural travel experience. Our service project was to help a Dominican community rebuild homes for their most needy community members. We left with great plans of making a difference in others’ lives, but, as I think back on the experience, the life that changed the most was mine.

This summer, Belmont University partnered with two Tanzanian community organizations through ECHO to give their students a similar experience. Twenty-one students from various majors came together to fulfill Belmont University’s vision of being a “Christian community of learning and service.” Over three weeks, students were introduced to the legacy of colonial rule in Southern and Eastern Africa and then to the work of restoration taken up by individuals and communities. As part of the experience, the students spent two days with ECHO in Tanzania, helping Grandma Maggie, a village elder, dig contours on her hillside farming plots. According to the students, “She worked alongside us and expressed her gratitude for the work we had done with ECHO.” They learned how to measure contours, dug ditches, planted trees and grasses, and channeled water from the nearby roads into the field ditches.

This was not only a huge physical help and encouragement to Grandma Maggie, but the students and professors were also blessed. Students, David and Jordan, reflected that, “This trip is so many things, but challenging is the word that describes it best. And not in a sense of difficulty, but in a sense of growth. I think we can speak for the whole team when we say that the things we are experiencing in Africa are broadening our understandings of people and culture, and instilling in us a thirst for knowledge and new experiences.”

Manuel Cruz, professor of Theology and leader of the student team, shared that they partnered with ECHO because they had never been exposed to faith-based agricultural work. He continued, “As a theologian, I was taken by the notion of an agricultural missionary and of ministry through agriculture. I certainly understood that Christians had a religious and evangelical obligation to feed the hungry, but I had never followed through on the agricultural implications of such a mission. I am beginning to realize that my vision of feeding the hungry has been limited by the urban privilege I give to the palliative ministry of homeless shelters and food pantries. The work of ECHO is helping me think at a more fundamental level concerning the Christian horizon of growing food as it intersects the life of the hungry.”

ECHO greatly appreciates the work of the Belmont professors and students! In a few hours, they were able to dig contours that will help Grandma Maggie’s fields retain more water.
for her crops while at the same time, slowing erosion and water runoff. I know that this experience will shape the rest of the students’ lives, as it did mine.

In the past year, several miles of contour bunds have been measured and dug in these villages and village by-laws to fight erosion (which had been rescinded for more than a decade) have been re-enacted.

This multi-faceted blessing is only possible because of your ongoing support of ECHO through Impact Centers around the world. Thank you for your investment in ECHO’s mission, which trains and shapes students and adults from Nashville to Tanzania, and around the world! 😊

Storytelling Summer Practicum

This issue of ECHO news features two stories written by McKenzie Van Loh, our first participant in the Storytelling Summer Practicum. McKenzie is a senior journalism student at Bethel University in St. Paul, Minnesota. She has a passion for God’s creation and telling others’ stories with truth and dignity. This summer, McKenzie has been interviewing those who have been impacted by ECHO’s mission, and telling their stories.

This internship was made possible by Gene and Kathy Johnson who have a vision of equipping Bethel University journalism students with multi-faceted opportunities to engage in cross cultural experiences.

We hope this ongoing partnership is enriching for McKenzie, and many others, as she connects with our local and international partners.
In our previous issue of ECHO News, we introduced this series which will be exploring nine Biblical themes that provide the foundation for the mission of ECHO. This issue will examine the first theme of the Stewardship of God’s Creation.

The first great commission given to humanity is to steward God’s creation.

The Bible clearly identifies God as the creator of all things. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Gen 1:1)

God’s claim on His own creation is unequivocal. “I alone am God, the First and the Last. It was my hand that laid the foundations of the earth, my right hand that spread out the heavens above. When I call out the stars, they all appear in order.” (Isaiah 48:12-13)

Remarkably, God entrusts us with his creation. As the creation account unfolds in Genesis 1, we discover God’s lofty mission for humankind: we are to fill the earth and govern it.

“God said, ‘Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground.’ So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. Then God blessed them and said, ‘Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it.’” (Gen 1:26-28)

The earth is God’s property but it is our responsibility to tend and care for it as stewards of God’s creation.

As humans made in God’s image, we look to our Creator for a model of good governance. We are to govern the earth as God governs us. God rules us in love, always seeking our best (Romans 8:28). We are to do the same in our care for God’s creation.

Our attentive stewardship of God’s creation is further described in Genesis 2. “The LORD God planted a garden in Eden in the east, and there he placed the man he had made. The LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it.” (Genesis 2:8,15)

Stewarding God’s creation is not the deification of nature or the exploitation of the earth. Stewardship is cooperating with God in conserving and tending what He made. British theologian, John Stott writes, “The earth belongs to God by creation and to us by delegation.”

It is sobering to consider the magnitude of responsibility entrusted to us by God to care for a world He created with such love and ingenuity.

The stewardship of God’s creation is a privilege and responsibility. It’s the first great commission given to humanity and the foundation for ECHO’s work.
What’s not to love about a honeymoon in Florida? Newlyweds have enjoyed lounging at the beach, touring Disney world...and now volunteering at ECHO! Just four days after their wedding on April 15th, Rachel and Jared Scoville dropped by ECHO for a day of volunteering and a tour.

When Jared went to school at Gordon College, he went on the school’s annual spring break trip to ECHO. He had the opportunity to become fully immersed in the experience of working there, including reinforcing the Global Classroom for hurricane protection, tending to the rabbits and working in the fields. Jared had so much fun, he started growing a Moringa tree in his dining room.

“I told everyone I knew about the Moringa tree just cause it was fun to talk about. Even to this day it’s stillin our garden. I’ve gardened ever since,” Jared said.

When the Scovilles started to plan their honeymoon, they thought Florida would offer a good chance to go to the beach and visit ECHO.

Rachel had heard all about Jared’s fond memories from the Farm, but didn’t quite know what to expect when she arrived. After taking a tour, she understood Jared’s excitement.

“It was truly an amazing experience. I was really blown away by ECHO and the impact they have around the world,” Rachel said.

Today, Rachel works as a behavioral analyst in their town of Bristol, Connecticut. Jared is working toward his doctorate degree in physical therapy at the University of Hartford. In their free time the Scovilles tend to their 50 foot by 50 foot garden plot where their Moringa trees are growing.

If you are passionate about ECHO’s mission, sign up for a volunteer position on ECHO’s website: www.echonet.org/volunteer

What’s not to love? ☀️

First Resource in Hindi

Resource Document on Modified Mat Rice Seedling Nurseries Now Available at ECHOcommunity.org

During the ECHO Northeast India meeting in October 2010, Dr. D.P. Patel, a scientist with the Indian Centre for Agricultural Research, offered a presentation on System of Rice Intensification that included a portion related to the Modified Mat Nursery. This style of raising rice seedlings offers various benefits over conventional nurseries for the production of healthy and strong young rice seedlings for SRI and other rice production systems.

In partnership with the Indian Centre for Agricultural Research, ECHO published this technical resource on modified mat nurseries in Asia Notes #9 and a partner has now translated this valuable resource into Hindi. Hindi is the second most natively spoken language in the world, second only to Mandarin Chinese, and opens this resource up to 490 million people. ☘️
My name is Kelly Wilson, and I am the Community Garden intern. I graduated from Wheaton College in May 2016 with a degree in Environmental Science, a Spanish minor, and a certificate in Human Needs and Global Resources (HNGR). Throughout college, I grew in my understanding of the connectedness between people and the land, God’s call for justice and peace in the midst of poverty and oppression, and the invitation God offers to participate in His whispers of restoration. These reflections in conjunction with formative moments shared with small-scale farmers in Latin America are what led me to ECHO.

I am deeply grateful to be an ECHO intern, and have been amazed by the abundance of agricultural knowledge and training I have received in the last nine months. While soil stewardship, tropical plant identification, sheep midwifery, and seed storage all come to mind as just a few of the many things I have learned, I have found that the most significant part of the internship is my relationships. Life together with the intern community, ECHO staff, and volunteers has truly been a gift. Laughter, wisdom, care, compassion, and healing coalesce as we share meals, weed garden beds, pollinate pumpkins, and sanitize greenhouse trays. I have come to appreciate and value the space that the garden and the table create in bringing people together with one another and with God, resulting in fullness of life and love. As the Community Garden intern, I have also been uniquely able to witness how local community gardens in churches, schools, and organizations patiently create this space and build bridges to connect people to the land, their food, and each other.

I hope to continue to cultivate these spaces of communion as I finish the remaining five months of my internship and afterwards. Whatever the future may hold, I plan to follow God, my Good Shepherd, as He satisfies the needs of the hungry, renews the groaning creation, and leads us all into abundant life with Him.

Glenda, the newest lamb

with Glenda and her mom, Dowry
Too many times I have caught myself thinking, what would I do if I had money, you know, real money, money that could actual make an impact on someone’s life or the world? Why not dream big if you’re going to dream, right?

I’m not wealthy, but I know I want to make a difference. I want to be able to make an impact in this world, and I want to honor God. So, I started researching ideas that would make sense for me and my family, that would still allow me to enjoy a comfortable retirement. What I found was the Charitable Gift Annuity.

Now this is not something new or even trendy, but it does make sense for those who want to make a difference by partnering with ECHO. The Charitable Gift Annuity is a solution to my desire to give, while still benefiting from a steady cash flow.

So this is what I found: a charitable gift annuity is a tool that provides you with a fixed income for life AND leaves a lasting gift to ECHO. On top of that, there are several tax benefits, including federal income tax charitable deductions.

Here are some of the benefits of partnering with ECHO through a Charitable Gift Annuity:

- Receive fixed payments to you or another annuitant you designate for life
- Receive a charitable income tax deduction for the charitable gift portion of the annuity
- Benefit from payments that may be partially tax-free
- Provide sustainable, life changing solutions to hunger to those who need it most.

*ALWAYS consult with your financial and tax professional to determine what is best for you.

Bless others by partnering with ECHO. For more information contact JoDee Hanssen at 239.567.3309 or jhanssen@echonet.org.

The papaya (Carica papaya), known in some parts of the world as “papaw” or “pawpaw”, is a member of the Caricaceae family. This fruit is believed to have been native to tropical America, and has since been introduced to warm areas of the world with abundant rainfall. It was commonly grown commercially in Florida until viruses caused a setback. Today, the papaya has regained popularity with very popular varieties such as Red Lady, ideal for the South Florida gardener of all degrees of expertise.

Commonly known as a small tropical “tree”, papayas are actually large herbs capable of growing 6-10 feet in the first year. They are ideal for gardeners with limited space as their canopy is generally 6 feet across. A healthy papaya tree can yield an average 75 lbs. of fruit per year.

We recommend planting more than one papaya, with at least 6 foot spacing, in a flood-free area. Even brief exposure to standing water will kill the tree. Therefore creating “turtle-back” mounds for planting is an effective way to deter flood damage. Under good conditions, papayas can live twenty years although to maintain good productivity, replace plants after a few years. The papaya is frost sensitive but is able to grow back if the trunk is not too damaged.

The papaya has been called the “melon of health”. A delicious source of iron, calcium, and vitamins A, B, C, and G, the versatile papaya can be eaten fresh, dehydrated, canned, cooked, juiced, or in jam.
Training in Turkana

Have you ever noticed how broad ECHO resources are? One community may benefit from hands-on training in seed-saving or fish farming while another needs training in animal husbandry, composting or developing a community garden. Each unique context has different needs. To offer the most beneficial resources, ECHO partners with insiders who know the challenges of the area, and have insight to what works.

For a recent training in Turkana, Kenya, ECHO’s Regional Director led community members through a participatory rural assessment that equipped villagers and local leaders to identify the needs of the community.

From this information, the ECHO team tailored a four-day training curriculum to meet these needs. Focus was placed on small garden beds, such as sack gardens and keyhole gardens that would maximize yield while minimizing water needs. Interest was so high that participants showed up an entire day early, and asked the team to add a day of training because the trainings were addressing fundamental needs in their lives.

ECHO is thankful that our partner, Share International, will be on hand for follow up and further training for these villages. As ECHO integrates scripture into the science of agriculture, Share International will share the Good News of the Gospel and complete the Holistic training partnership.