in this issue:  the great multiplier  • seed saving can be life-saving  • networks expand in Latin America  • power in the produce  • intern spotlight: Evan Neubacher
in this issue

ECHO exists to follow Jesus by reducing hunger and improving lives worldwide through partnerships that equip people with agricultural resources and skills.

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 2 Corinthians 9:6

ECHO is laser-focused on the principle of multiplication. As we enter 2018, we are awaiting the results of independent external assessments of the multiplication rate of ECHO’s direct trainings around the world.* These results will give us a “baseline” reference point as we work to increase our multiplication rates in the coming years. The idea is very simple: good seed, well planted, in good soil, will multiply!

Of course, while ECHO does produce and distribute actual seeds, I’m talking about training that spreads knowledge and skills about plants, practices and appropriate technologies that can reduce hunger and improve the lives of resource-poor farming families. Equipping these farmers to thrive AND share what they have learned with others increases the impact many times over!

As you will read in this issue of ECHO News, we are generously “sowing” in West Africa, East Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia, and in Southwest Florida. Even the by-products of our training – fresh fruits and vegetables – are being shared with a local food bank and soup kitchen. Consistent with the principle articulated by the Apostle Paul, we are also seeing a generous harvest that is making a difference in the lives of women, children and men all around the world. As they share what they have learned, the benefits and blessings spread throughout churches and communities. Hunger is reduced, lives are improved, and God is glorified!

All of this is possible because of those of you who choose to “sow generously” into ECHO and through us to the world. As you read, please join us in giving thanks for the abundant harvest that is flowing from this generosity!

In gratitude,

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* Once we have the results of these assessments, we will be making them public.

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Farmers use chemical fertilizer to tend to the plants that survive the torrents. However, doing so steals even more nutrients from the soil and won’t allow crops to grow as well in it the next season. In addition, farmers often sign contracts with cotton companies with hopes to make money through mass cotton production. When crops fail, farmers are left with nothing.

Sanou sees the great need for agricultural revival in West Africa, but he also sees need for spiritual revival.

Before each training, Sanou and his team take time to fast and pray. They ask God to use them to teach about His love and to bring abundant crops to the West Africans who come for training. They ask God for safety and food security in the midst of terrorist attacks like the one in Mali on June 18 or Soum Province on Feb. 27. Sometimes Sanou will lock himself in his office to pray, telling his team he will see no visitors until he is finished.

During trainings, Sanou and his team teach farmers how to build rock bunds to protect crops from ripping out of the soil in the flash floods of the rainy season. They teach lessons on composting, explaining the importance of returning nutrients back to the starving soil. They teach Farming God’s Way, a technique to grow plants under decaying organic matter. Most importantly, ECHO teaches West Africans about God’s love and how they can follow Him, too.

The Gospel message is Sanou’s inspiration. “I remember Jesus Christ feeding people when they are hungry and teaching them that they need the Word of God,” Sanou said.

After hours of training, the men and women disperse to their homes, knowing they have been given an invaluable gift. When gray, heavy clouds arrive at the start of a rainy season, ECHO-trained farmers can stand tall in their fields. They are ready.

To measure the effectiveness of their trainings, Sanou and his team believe follow-up is essential. Are the techniques working? Are the farmers succeeding? Six months after a training, a farmer invited Sanou and his team to visit.

“You have to come see this,” the farmer said with excitement. “The sorghum is tall! The millet is green and abundant! Come see the product of your work!”

During his visit, Sanou did notice something different about this village. The crops didn’t heave dismally in the sun. Instead, they swayed valiantly in the breeze. When he looked at the faces of the villagers, they carried themselves closer. They only speak to each other when they are closer. They only speak to ask questions, and never to complain. What Sanou has to say is a matter of life or death.

Sanou is ECHO’s West Africa Regional Impact Director. He travels to villages in the region to lead agricultural trainings for farmers to learn, apply and teach efficient farming practices.

During the dry season, the sun bakes the nutrients out of the pale, brown dirt. It steals the sweat off bodies without notice. Food is scarce and expensive. The water is dirty or gone. Bony cows collapse in the dust with empty stomachs and dry tongues.

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Farming in West Africa isn’t for the faint-hearted.

The rainy season is unpredictable. Sometimes it arrives in April or May. Sometimes the wait tests farmers and their families even longer. When it decides to show up, the floodgates open. The deluge rips the topsoil from the ground, leaving fields with minimal nutrients. The erosion snatches crops from their fields and carries them away before having a chance to ripen.

The temperature in Burkina Faso is 109 degrees. Robert Sanou gathers a group of farmers under a neem tree to shield themselves from the heat.

“The sorghum is tall! The millet is green and abundant! Come see the product of your work!”

“Sometimes the wait tests farmers and their trainees will go on to teach more farmers; multiplying ECHO’s impact one training at a time.”

We invite you to join us in prayer that God, the great multiplier, would extend ECHO’s reach to reduce hunger and improve lives of the hardworking families of West Africa.

While standing in this transformed village, Sanou told farmers, “This is the fruit of what we have done with God. We have been praying for God to provide healthy crops, and our God is good!”

Sometimes, Sanou invites his friends and family to his house to have a thankfulness party. Together, they celebrate all God has accomplished in West Africa through ECHO.

However, Sanou and his team know there is much more work to be done. With 2.5 million people* at risk for food insecurity in Burkina Faso alone, ECHO focuses on educating farmers to equip them with hands on skills. ECHO hopes their trainees will go on to teach more farmers, multiplying ECHO’s impact one training at a time.

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*https://wfpusa.org/countries/burkina-faso/
Networks Expand in Latin America

One of ECHO’s newest staff members is Cecilia Gonzalez – the team leader for the Latin America/Caribbean region. She is from Ecuador and attended agriculture college in Honduras at the Pan-American Agricultural University, “Zamorano.” Additional studies took her to the University of Arkansas and Cornell University. This interview by Gene Fifer will take you inside the heart and passion that Cecilia has for the region.

Gene Fifer - How is the Latin American/Caribbean Regional Impact Team structured?

Cecilia Gonzalez – Our team is a small, but growing team, that through ECHO community reaches a very diverse region, particularly within the tropics. It includes the islands of the Caribbean, the northern part of South America, the Andes, Central America, Mexico, and even the Latin America diaspora in South and Southwest Florida. The Latin American/Caribbean region has about 2,400 ECHO Community members. We are inclusive of many cultures, different languages, and many different types of partnerships with local organizations. Regional partners seek technical advice, trainings, seeds, and opportunities to connect with other members of the ECHO community.

Libby Arcia (the region’s program coordinator) and I are native Spanish speakers, which is the majority language in the region. We are focused on providing more publications and advisory services in Spanish. ECHO also has a long history of working in Haiti and our colleague, Brian Flanagan who grew up in Haiti and speaks Creole, helps with connecting to partners there.

GF – How is your region different from the other Regional Impact Centers and how does that affect the programming you offer?

CG – It spent about one week in each country in Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Cuba. In Nicaragua, we visited partners that promote the Biointensive Method for food production and soil conservation. They have a demonstration area at the National Agriculture University. This partner would like ECHO’s assistance with training in seed saving and seed banking to better serve their members and communities.

In Honduras, I was hosted by the director of the horticulture innovation lab at Zamorano University. Zamorano has about 12,300 acres of property to impart practical hands-on teaching in all areas of sustainable agriculture. They focus on the needs of smallholder farmers and how they can adapt to a changing climate. Their philosophy aligns with ECHO at the practical level. Any innovations that improve and diversify crops and incomes help farmers become more resilient.

In Guatemala, I visited Miracles in Action and their work in improving nutrition, education, and job training with Mayan populations. Their work connecting cottage industries and value chains is particularly empowering.

In Cuba, my colleagues Kelly Wilson, Bob Hargrave, and I were hosted by the United Methodist Church. Several pastors, church leaders, and ministries are involved in food production by raising animals and cultivating crops. They expressed sincere desire and commitment to use the land they had to bless others with food. They were interested in serving the widows and orphans in the church as well as the local medical facilities. One particular church had the dream to be a training center that will teach others about agriculture. They are interested in ECHO’s help to share expertise through workshops about livestock management, especially pig production and biogas.

GF – Besides hands-on trainings and publications, what else do the partners in your region need?

CG – A big need is finding who else in your country or region is doing similar and complementary projects. Helping people network is important and ECHO’s community has developed tools for connecting people and organizations with similar interests. We also need to distribute publications to groups that don’t have reliable internet. We at ECHO freely share our information; we share our publications through flash drives and other offline means.

Our goal is to connect to people where they are serving and help them help others. These church members and leaders are the future of ECHO’s mission and will soon be multiplying ECHO’s training and resources across Cuba.

Right: Farmers in Cuba host ECHO staff members at their small farms, expressing their desire to bless their Cuban neighbors with food.
what’s happening at ECHO

Eggplant grafting seminar at ECHO Asia’s Agricultural and Community Development Conference, Thailand. #improvinglives2017

#echofightshunger

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

Curious Calves

Calves, Musa (white and black) and Jemma (brown), enjoy rotational grazing spaces at ECHO-Florida.

Invasive Weed Harms Livelihoods

A women’s group in Tanzania invited ECHO to share about parthenium, an invasive weed dangerous to crops and livestock, their primary sources of income. The presentation included how to safely uproot the weed. The women were so interested and concerned that they invited us to come back again.

Trainings Across West Africa

Left: In November, the ECHO West Africa team trained parents of school children to plant and care for a garden in the village school. Right: While being trained on drip irrigation, Bernard Sié Kansié (Promesse) was asked, on the spot, to share his expertise in gardening techniques and creating liquid fertilizer.

Laussane Conference in Taiwan

ECHO-Florida held its first seed banking workshop in 2017 with attendees representing global efforts in locations such as Haiti, Mozambique, Ghana, Liberia, and Central America. Joy Longfellow, former intern and current employee of Johnny’s Seeds, was a special guest and shared expertise related to crop breeding and other topics. The workshop concluded with the first seed swap exercise conducted on the Florida campus. These attendees are winnowing seeds in the new seed demonstration barn. Read more about it on page 9.

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Seed saving can be life-saving

An agricultural leader learns to increase availability of seed for her community.

Seed saving is of particular interest for Debra Kiliru. How can a community create a source of organic seed while trying to establish sustainable agricultural practices?

In her exploration for a solution, she came across the “Seed Saving” training at ECHO’s Global Farm in Fort Myers. “When I saw this class advertised, I knew I needed to go,” she said. She has since become a member of the ECHO online community, learning and exchanging techniques through forums. The five-day training opened up a whole new community of like-minded people across the world working towards the same goal—sustainable and accessible seed.

Growing up in Kenya, Kiliru became involved in sustainable agriculture and holistic health, and has since traveled around the world doing this work—particularly in parts of Africa. Kiliru recently returned from living in Ghana since 2012, where she worked with organic farmers and helped start a farmers market to give the community access to organic foods.

Kiliru particularly enjoyed a section of the training on seed multiplication, harvesting, processing, and storage. “And getting a chance to see the ECHO seed bank was invaluable in thinking through how I could make the learning applicable to my context.”

These techniques Kiliru gained at the ECHO Seed-Saving training not only answered a specific and pestering question for her work, but also opened a community of collaborators and friends at ECHO. The seed-saving skills she gained at this training can literally be life-saving for her community in Ghana. These are the lessons she hopes to transfer to her organization leaders.

“I left the training excited not just to keep farming, but to become a seed farmer myself.”

“Seeds are the life source of our existence, and must be cared for with the utmost respect and diligence,” she said. “Plus, I had been so curious about the ECHO farm ever since I found out about it,” she said. “Needless to say, the farm exceeded my expectations.”

The interactive nature of the training with so many others in similar fields opened up a community she knew existed, but had never taken advantage of. “It was so wonderful to meet people who have worked in different parts of the world and the U.S., and to share experiences and teach each other,” she explained. “And getting a chance to see the ECHO seed bank was invaluable in thinking through how I could make the learning applicable to my context.”

“...the ECHO Seed Bank was invaluable in thinking through how I could make the learning applicable to my context.”

Kiliru also facilitated a youth leadership and organic agriculture program in Ghana with students from elementary to high school age, called Youth PLANT, to make seeds more available and their harvesting more sustainable.

Students of Youth PLANT show off their harvest!
A partnership between ECHO and a Florida food bank provides fresh food to those experiencing hunger in Southwest Florida.

Past the aisles of canned fruit, tomato soup and peanut butter, sits a produce shelf at Community Cooperative, a food bank and soup kitchen. This morning, the options are slim. Potatoes, limp lettuce, and onions are taking the stage.

“We haven’t put our food from ECHO on the shelf yet today,” Community Cooperative’s Director of Development and Marketing Stefanie Ink-Edwards said.

Community Cooperative is an organization in Lee county, Florida that aims to eliminate hunger and homelessness in the region. ECHO and Community Cooperative have had a long time partnership. On a weekly basis, Community Cooperative will pick up donated food from ECHO. The produce goes into the community market, soup kitchen, meals on wheels and a mobile pantry.

ECHO’s produce is especially noticeable in the community market. Families walk through and choose their own food off the shelves instead of being sent a box of food they may not like. On days when fresh produce is not available, families have very few options. By partnering with ECHO and other local growers, the community market is able to help community market “shoppers” add fresh vegetables to their diets.

However, Community Cooperative doesn’t stop there.

“We find that partnering with great organizations like ECHO allows us to pass on knowledge about how to sustain your life by growing your own food and utilizing the natural resources we have in our world,” Community Cooperative’s Chief Executive Officer Tracey Galloway said.

Community Cooperative recently planted their own garden in their backyard as a way to better pass on this knowledge and grow fresh produce themselves. They provide gardening classes to teach the community what the staff members have learned from ECHO.

After learning from ECHO, Community Cooperative teaches useful skills like how to reuse rain water, how to grow plants in small spaces and how to grow things that are inexpensive to grow and easy to cook.

ECHO is proud to serve our local community, whether it’s sharing knowledge to grow food, or the joy of eating tasty, fresh foods when it fills the produce shelf, arrives at their doorstep or is served in a hot meal.

ECHO donates over one ton of produce each year to Community Cooperative. Their community market brims with ECHO produce each week for clients to take home free of charge.

**ECHO’s Irma Can’t Have Our Joy**

ECHO’s resilience put to the test as hurricane-force winds toppled trees and research plantings.

On September 11th, the sun rose over an ECHO-Florida campus littered with scores of downed trees, plants stripped of their leaves, and a complete absence of electricity. Once we had absorbed the obvious devastation of Hurricane Irma, we began to see that there was also much we had to be thankful for: the days of hurricane preparation had paid-off; our staff and their families were all safe; none of ECHO’s buildings had sustained serious damage; and, all of our farm animals had survived.

The temporary inconveniences associated with the absence of electricity – potentially unsafe water, non-functioning toilets, spoiled food, and insufferable heat from which there was no relief – all served to fuel our eagerness to extend our service to the majority of our world’s people for whom our ‘inconveniences’ are persistent daily challenges.

And so, we set to work, shoulder-to-sweaty-shoulder in the 90-degree heat. Exposed trees were “painted”, chainsaws were buzzing, tractors were throttled-up, roads were cleared, thawing food was salvaged from freezers, camping stoves were fired-up, and port-a-johns were procured. Volunteers began to arrive...from across the Atlantic, from New England, the upper Midwest, and other parts of Florida. We received encouraging reminders of the impact and blessing that ECHO has been in the lives of people around the world. There were treasured assurances of prayers on our behalf.

By the beginning of November, most of the ECHO-Florida campus had been transformed! The efforts of over 250 volunteers, along with more than 4,000 hours of staff-time, achieved what had hardly seemed possible. And the generous gifts of 599 people fully covered all of the Irma-related costs!
My name is Evan Neubacher and I currently man the Urban Garden intern position. I have come to ECHO after working for a number of years for a non-profit in microfinance and a small vegetable farm, both located in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Prior to that, in 2009 I completed my undergraduate degree in economics and masters in International and Development Economics. Agriculture has been something that has been an interest of mine for quite some time but I haven’t pursued fully until the opportunity presented itself to intern with ECHO.

I walked into this internship with a rather limited background in agriculture, let alone tropical agriculture. So, for the past eight months, I have been completely immersed in the power and awe of God’s creation. Through the help of fellow interns, staff, and the myriad of resources ECHO has, I’ve been able to grow in the nuts and bolts of agriculture. More than that though I’ve been able to see how all the aspects of creation, from microorganisms to trees to animals, depend on each other to have a healthy and productive ecosystem. Working closely with all the other interns and staff here, I’m continuing to learn that people are not exempt from this either. With all our different gifts, passions, and backgrounds we each add something to the farm and overall community of ECHO, allowing us to glorify God more fully.

During my time here at ECHO and other agricultural experiences I have been able to see the characteristics of God and have learned many valuable lessons that apply to all aspects of life. When my internship wraps up at the end of February, I hope to pursue my passion of working with inner city youth that come from tough family situations, through agriculture. I aspire to help these kids see the inherent value of themselves and those around them because they are God’s creation.

As individuals plan for their loved ones and their favorite charitable organizations, Beneficiary Designations of assets – including bank & brokerage accounts, life insurance plans, 401(k)s, IRAs, and Donor Advised Funds – can direct all or portions of remainders to named recipients. Multiple beneficiaries are allowed, as are Contingency Beneficiaries, should your primary beneficiary not survive you.

These gifts can be easily set up for free by asking for a beneficiary form from plan administrators, HR representatives, or financial institutions. They do not require an estate planning service nor executor. Designations can be reviewed or adjusted at any time for any reason should circumstances change.

Benefits: Beneficiary Designations can be used in place of, or in conjunction with, a Will. Beneficiary Designations supersede designations named in a Will, should a donor have both. Designations named to a 501(c)3 organization like ECHO would be tax free, whereas portions to heirs other than spouses would be taxed. For information on your Beneficiary Designations, contact your asset administrators. To learn more about Planned Gifts to ECHO, contact us at 239.567.3319 or visit http://echonet.org/gift-options.

Even with our world’s fluctuating conditions, ECHO will continue its mission: following Jesus by reducing hunger and improving lives worldwide through partnerships that equip people with agricultural resources and skills.

Recipe: Slow Cooker Pumpkin Soup

**Ingredients**

1 medium butternut squash or seminole pumpkin  
1 small sweet potato  
1 quart veggie or chicken stock  
2 lbs honey  
Salt and pepper  
1 large onion  
1 clove garlic, crushed  
Sour cream or coconut cream to serve

**Instructions**

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.  
2. Cut pumpkin into wedges, leaving skin on and remove seeds.  
3. Peel sweet potatoes and cut into wedges.  
4. Sprinkle both with salt and pepper and drizzle with 2 tbs of olive oil.  
5. Place in oven and cook for 30 min. or until soft.  
6. While cooking, chop onion into small pieces.  
7. Add chicken stock, honey, and onion to slow cooker.  
8. Remove pumpkin and sweet potato from oven. Remove flesh of pumpkin from skin and add sweet potato and pumpkin to slow cooker.  
9. Cook for 4 hours on low.  
10. Blend mixture with a hand blender or food processor until smooth.  
11. Serve with crusty bread and a dollop of sour cream or coconut cream.
Asian Outreach Cambodia sent a group of their Cambodian and US staff members to ECHO Asia’s Improving Lives Conference to learn and grow together. Pictured right, the team took a photo with ECHO’s Abram Bicksler.

“Here we learned new grafting techniques for tomatoes, eggplants, and peppers, soil improvement strategies, chicken-raising techniques and how to improve yields using high quality seeds. We got to see these techniques in action on field trips as part of the conference. It was an amazing week.”