

S U M M E R 2 0 1 3

# the Liberia Report

By: Brian Smith



## Prayer Points

- Please be praying for our demonstration gardens at LICC which are under attack by insects.
- Pray for our upcoming trip to Kenya that will be August 23<sup>rd</sup>-September 6<sup>th</sup>.
- Praise God for the eagerness of the Liberians to learn about the Gospel and farming.



Agristewards has just returned from Liberia where we worked alongside Travis and Gina Sheets and their newly formed ministry called *Hope In the Harvest*. Travis and Gina are preparing to move to Ganta, Liberia and teach agriculture at the Liberia International Christian College. The farmers in the area have been setback due to a 14 year civil war. Even though the war has been over for 7 years, very little to no development has occurred for 21 years. Ganta is the second largest city in Liberia and they were just beginning to reset electric poles in the community in order to bring power back to the communities. The sight and sounds of small generators were a common sight as we traveled through town or while we shopped for seeds or parts. Agriculture education there is non-existent. The majority of the farmers worked a ½ an acre by hand. They receive an abundance of rainfall and have to clear the rainforest to farm, they work the area 3 or 4 years practicing slash and burn and move on to a new area once the land becomes unproductive. Imagine their shock when I told them we farm the same land for over 100 years in Indiana, it was beyond their comprehension! Through the lessons in Farming God's Way we showed them how to add inputs to the soil and we taught them the importance of mulch being that it decomposes and adds organic matter. The combination of using mulch and compost enhances the soil which improves yields rather than diminish them.



As we drove from the capitol of Monrovia to Ganta I was surprised at how very little livestock population there was in Liberia. I began to wonder what I could use for a fertilizer source in our demonstration garden and was beginning to think I may have to settle for using a green manure. Then I began to notice small patches of corn that were very lush and green very near their houses which were in stark contrast of the yellow anemic corn growing in their half acre fields. I began to inquire why this corn looked so healthy and they quickly responded that it was because of the “black dirt”.

Further investigation helped me realize that this was their trash pile from the last 50 years. Each cluster of homes had an area designated where they had thrown their trash which had turned to compost. Soon we were making numerous trips to town looking for the “black dirt” that we could take back to the college and use on the farm. Some caught on quickly to the value and began wanting to charge us, while others let us take it for free looking for a way to clear off future building sights. We had to sift through old shoe parts, broken glass, plastic, and palm nuts, but we were able to accumulate quite a pile of productive soil amendment. We even built a screen to sift out other unwanted items before placing the compost in our demonstration gardens. The farmers were excited about this new found resource and we even taught them how to make their own compost for the future. Fertilizer was nonexistent in Ganta and was extremely expensive and hard to find in Monrovia. Through our

teaching we also learned that one of the biggest challenges the farmers were facing was insect damage. I had never seen so many grass hoppers in one place. I shared with them the potential of making their own insecticide from the Neem tree, something I had learned about at ECHO in North Fort Myers, Florida. I have located some seeds and plan to send them over with Travis the next time he is home. The Liberians were ecstatic to learn they can soon make their own insecticide.







## Meet Albert

The highlight of my trip was working alongside Albert. Travis had hired Albert to assist him with the farm work at LICC. Albert had read a book printed in the 1980's about conservation tillage. He understood proper spacing and many other concepts that most other Africans have never hear of. He quickly soaked up the teaching of Farming God's Way and spent most evenings with me asking about different farming techniques and principles. While in Ganta I taught three different groups of 20 students and Albert sat in on each session. We decided to let Albert teach the final session because he had learned so quickly. In my three

years of Agristewards I have never had a native teach a Farming God's Way class. It was my greatest thrill to watch Albert teach his own people. The students were from many small communities surrounding Ganta and asked if Albert could come teach FGW to their community, it was awesome to see the potential of how quickly FGW can multiply in this community! The students sat on the edge of their seats, were fully engaged, and asked great questions. They begged us to teach more and stayed after class asking questions and many exclaimed they wanted to change their major to agriculture. What a blessing and joy for a teacher to have students so eager to learn. What a pleasure for me to know that Albert can continue to spread the Good News after I leave. Praise God for Farming God's Way and the balance of spiritual, management, and agricultural lessons.





## Using the BUV

Due to generous gifts to Agristewards we were able to purchase a BUV (basic utility vehicle) for Hope in the Harvest. While it will perform a variety of tasks at LICC one goal we had in mind was to mechanize Farming God's Way. At Lamb Farms we designed and built a one row strip till bar in order to strategically place compost below the seed before planting. We started with a frame for a disc designed to be pulled with an atv. We removed the disc gangs and added an opening wheel, an anhydrous knife shank, and a hopper to hold the compost.



We were not aware of the large number of roots that we would be farming through. After making it half way through our plot we had to go to town in search of a welder to strengthen our tool bar. After some repairs we were able to complete the field with no problems. We then hooked up the one row planter and planted corn in our new field. We attracted quite a crowd in the community as no one had ever seen mechanized farming before!



Our prayer is that the Liberians will adopt not only the agricultural lessons taught, but the spiritual lessons as well and will be richly blessed through God. We pray the Liberians will experience God's blessings in direct proportion to their faithfulness and learn that they too are blessed to be a blessing to those around them.

