

NEIGHBORS

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Inside:

**How our Communities are
Coping with the Pandemic**



Dear Neighbor:

When we published our Spring issue of *Neighbors* in March, we all hoped that by July the pandemic would be under control. As you all know, unfortunately, that is not the case. In most of the 13 countries where we work, lockdowns are still in effect. While we have much to offer the communities where we work around the world, we also learn so much from them. In this issue, you will read about what small holder farmers can teach us about sustainable, organic farming. We also have included an article about Timor-Leste that illustrates how its government policies and our work have helped to keep the coronavirus to a minimum in this small island nation.

The writings of Dr. John Peters are always inspirational and helpful when we encounter obstacles along the way. Contemplating how vast the needs are and what we can do to help can be overwhelming at times. Today, as the pandemic continues to ravage countries throughout the world, reading Dr. Peters' work can help sort through the barrage of devastating news. At times like these, it is essential to remember what Dr. Peters focused on throughout his tenure at the helm. His centering on the importance of community, action and compassion for each other are all as salient as ever:

"For it is now blindingly evident that, though riven by cultural bias and ethnic fears, we fellow passengers on this increasingly fragile space craft can know survival and fulfillment only as an interdependent family.

To work towards the accomplishment of that goal is our highest calling...'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself' is not a casual option, it is a crucial imperative. What is required of us is a willingness to be used and a readiness to get involved."
(*Improbable Journey*, p. 152)

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you for getting involved, loving thy neighbor and continuing to support World Neighbors during one of the worst pandemics in modern history. We hope you will continue to include World Neighbors when you think of helping non-profits. Please know that we are always deeply grateful for all your generosity. Wishing everyone good health and the strength to get through this difficult crisis.

With gratitude,

Kate Schecter, Ph.D.

President and CEO

The May Ayers Milburn Chair

P.S. World Neighbors continues to have the highest ratings with Charity Navigator, GuideStar and Charity Watch for most sound fiscal policies and transparency! Please know that your contribution will always be used with great care and deep appreciation.



Timorese students using a tippy tap

WHAT HELPED THIS ASIAN COUNTRY TO KEEP COVID-19 DEATHS AT ZERO?

A version of this article originally appeared in Forbes.com on June 21, 2020 and was written by Andrew Wight

Timor-Leste, also known as East Timor, has seen more than 50 days without new COVID-19 cases and has yet to report a single death, thanks in part to water initiatives designed to increase resilience to outside shocks.

When the first case of COVID-19 was reported on March 21, the government of the tiny Southeast Asian nation shut its borders with Indonesia, from which it gained independence in 2002 after a UN-backed referendum in 1999.

As of mid-June, the former Portuguese colony has only 24 reported cases, out of a total population of 1.3 million people.

Candido Dos Reis Amaral, Director of Public Infrastructure for the regional government of the Timorese exclave of Oecusse – Ambeno, says that despite that success, many private sector companies are losing revenue because of the reduced number of outsiders entering Timor-Leste.

“Timor-Leste closely borders Indonesia by land, so that’s why our government very strictly applied all the protocols

and procedures recommended by WHO,” he said, “And the public is very disciplined during this period to apply physical and social distancing.”

As the pandemic progressed, other measures were also implemented.

Fidelis Magalhães, Timor-Leste’s Minister of Legislative Reforms and Parliamentary Affairs and acting Minister Coordinator of Economic Affairs, said the national government has not only authorized a cash transfer of \$100 to households with monthly income of under \$500, they are also funding \$5 million in subsidies for agricultural machinery, fuel, technology, and inputs to keep food supply moving in the country.

An NGO working with Amaral in Oecusse–Ambeno credits part of the country’s COVID-19 success to governments and international development organizations helping Timor-Leste’s government increase resilience to outside shocks, especially climate change, in recent years.

World Neighbors, a capacity-building-focused NGO, runs the Increasing Community Resilience in Oecusse Program (ICRO). The ICRO program is funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which focuses on conserving and properly managing water in Timor-Leste’s Oecusse region.

One big benefit to these years of work has been an increased uptake in hand-washing.

Since the program started in 2015, hand-washing rates have skyrocketed via community-based education programs and the installation of simple hand washing devices called “tippy taps,” according to World Neighbors’ statistics.

These are water containers mounted on sticks or poles and a foot pedal causes it to tip and release enough water for hand-washing.

Edd Wright, Southeast Asia Regional Director for World Neighbors says the “tippy tap” component has been in place since the early days of the project.

“It is simple technology which would have already been known by our NGO partners and the communities from before the project started,” he said. “What ICRO did was to raise awareness on the importance of good personal hygiene and sanitation, which triggered the increased uptake of communities building and using the tippy-taps.”

Wright says this technology is especially important in areas of very low water accessibility, which is why it is suitable for many of the communities the NGO works with in the often-dry nation of Timor-Leste.

Amaral says the regional government and World Neighbors have collaborated on other infrastructure, including the construction, ongoing maintenance, and management plan for a healthy clean water system facility.

“World Neighbors as a partner made a very helpful contribution especially helping advocacy and building awareness in the use of water resources and how to sustainably protect them,” Amaral said.

Timor-Leste is far from the only place in the developing world where hand-washing and water security are crucial to the response to COVID-19.



A tippy-tap handwashing set-up in Timor-Leste

Turtle conservationist and health advocate Eric Quayson has been teaching fishermen hand-washing protocol on a beach in western Ghana.

Like Timor-Leste, Ghana moved fast compared to some industrialized countries in announcing travel restrictions. As of mid-June, Ghana had only about 8,000 reported active COVID-19 cases out of a population of around 30 million people.

COVID-19 AND THE GLOBAL FOOD SUPPLY: BIG LESSONS FROM THE WORLD'S SMALL FARMS

A version of this article originally appeared in foodtank.com in July 2020 and was written by Kate Schecter

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed both the strengths and limitations of globalization. The crisis has made people aware of how industrialized food production can be, and just how far food can travel to get to the local supermarket. There are many benefits to this system, including low prices for consumers and larger, even global, markets for producers. But there are also costs—to the environment, workers, small farmers and to a region or individual nation’s food security.

These costs have led many people to look once again at the benefits of small farms and locally produced fruits, vegetables and meat.

Of course, farmers on relatively small plots producing for local markets are the norm in developing countries. While it has many benefits, small-scale agriculture is far from idyllic. It often translates into low incomes and even poverty.



A small scale farm in Nepal

But it doesn't have to.

There are many successful initiatives to help farmers raise their productivity and incomes, improve their communities and amass capital to expand agricultural output and start small businesses. All of this can be done in an environmentally sustainable manner that builds resilience to external shocks, including climate change and even pandemics. As Edd Wright, World Neighbors Regional Director for Southeast Asia notes, "In Timor-Leste, to control the spread of the virus the government called a State of Emergency, which included the closing of all markets where people would normally buy and sell their weekly basic goods. Small-scale farmers have continued to have a secure supply of food during this emergency as they predominantly live off what they grow on their own land." These holistic community-based development programs also improve health and sanitation, teach literacy and help develop local leaders who plan and advocate for their communities.

Successes in farming communities in Nepal, India, East and West Africa, Guatemala, Peru and several other countries hold lessons for those in the US who look to small farms as a way to build resilience and food security. "Small-scale agricultural producers have a strong capacity for innovation," notes Do Christophe Ouattara, World Neighbors Senior Program Officer in West Africa. "In Burkina Faso, indigenous soil and water conservation techniques improve production and contribute considerably to food security."

While each community success story is different, they have a few essential commonalities:

Organic Methods. Vegetables, fruit, eggs and meat produced using organic and sustainable techniques are healthier, due to the lack of pesticides and other chemicals. It's also safer for farmers, who do not have to handle dangerous chemicals. Finally, organic production has far less impact on the environment.

For small farms, the advantage of organic agriculture is clear—higher profits. Replacing chemicals with organic pesticides and fertilizers can significantly reduce costs. Because of consumer willingness to pay a premium for "cleaner" food with a smaller environmental footprint, farmers can charge more. According to Binu Subedi, a World Neighbors Senior Social Mobilizer in Nepal, "Organic farming is based on the insight that there really is no such thing as 'waste.' Finding a use for byproducts is the easiest way to cut input costs and raise returns."

While organic techniques are becoming well-established throughout the world, there are still many techniques to learn from farmers in developing countries. These include animal-derived pesticides, closed loop aquaculture, simple low-water irrigation systems and more.

Cooperatives. There are many successful cooperatives in the US and other countries. By banding together, small holder farmers cut out middlemen and gain leverage with purchasers. They also provide the resources to invest in marketing, government advocacy and other activities that build markets and increase sales.



Members of a savings and credit group in Kenya

Cooperatives are especially helpful—even necessary—in countries where agricultural production is highly concentrated among a relative handful of dominant companies. The COVID-19 pandemic has put a spotlight on this reality in the United States’ meat processing industry. A handful of transnational companies dominate and have a monopoly on the industry. When meat processing workers got sick and meat production went down, the costs fell on workers and livestock farmers. The profits, in the form of higher meat prices to consumers, went to the handful of meat processing companies.

Small scale livestock farms (as well as processing plants that are organized into cooperatives) could help address this. While the final products would likely be a bit more expensive, the meat is far less likely to become contaminated with E. coli, salmonella or other contaminants. In addition, smaller processing plants tend to be safer and have less environmental impact on surrounding communities.

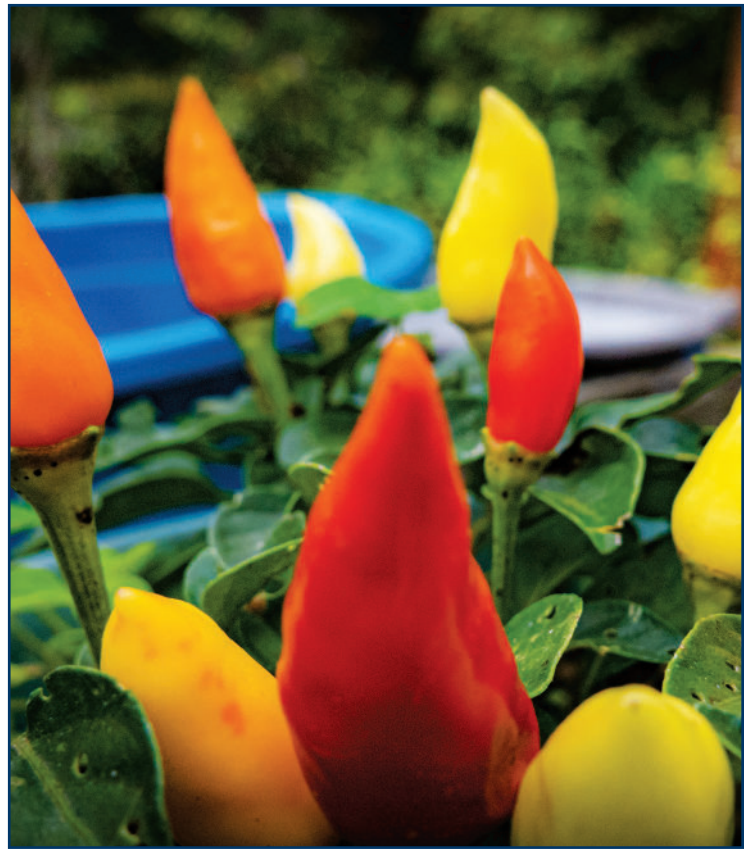
Successful cooperatives in Kenya and other developing countries have a lot to teach, including how to generate capital through savings and credit groups. These groups pool savings of small holder farmers and loan to members at very low rates. They eliminate onerous loan conditions and show forbearance if borrowers encounter setbacks. Savings and credit groups are often the first step to larger, more comprehensive cooperative relationships. It’s time to introduce these mechanisms in the US so that small scale farmers can thrive.

Heritage Varieties. Industrial farming has resulted in consistent and attractive produce and meat. But to achieve this, and at the scale necessary for profitability, the variety has been greatly reduced. In most stores in the U.S., there are relatively few types of each fruit or vegetable. And these tend to have fewer nutrients and flavor than varieties grown and eaten prior to the domination of industrial farming. The same is true with meat. Factory farmed chicken and turkey are all but flavorless compared to traditional breeds.

The desire for more variety, flavor and nutrition is the reason many consumers are slowly rediscovering heritage or heirloom varieties. Produced on small farms, these products are often available at high end restaurants, farmer’s markets and specialty supermarkets. Of course, this is just how organics started.

Like organics, heritage produce and meat often command a higher price. When produced organically, that translates into higher profits for small farm owners.

Peru, Guatemala and many other countries in the Global South have a great deal of experience with indigenous produce.



A small scale farm in Guatemala

The need to grow more of it is especially pressing now, as large food companies successfully market highly processed food in these countries. The result has been the worst of all worlds: chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and obesity have reached epidemic proportions. Small scale organic farmers have experience cultivating produce that is healthier and can counter these diseases. A resurgence of these traditional varieties brings increased self-sufficiency and food security as well. This expertise—as well as the heritage varieties themselves—can and should be put to use on American small farms. As Olga Chivalan, a single mother who farms her own small vegetable garden in Guatemala said, “My neighbors and I grow a variety of fruits and vegetables, including those native to our region. We believe the reliance on indigenous varieties contributes to our community’s good health.”

Globalization—of ideas, goods, capital and cooperation—is a significant achievement. It can also have downsides. They include how food is produced, transported and consumed on a large scale. Ironically, those downsides are best addressed by more globalization. Specifically, small holder farmers in developing countries sharing their innovations with like farmers in developed countries. There’s never a downside to learning how to improve incomes, health and security in responsible and sustainable ways.

The Paul Milburn Charitable Gift Fund at the Oklahoma City Community Foundation Awards WN a \$100,000 Matching Grant

In his lifetime, Mr. Paul Milburn of Shawnee, Oklahoma, was an extraordinarily generous friend and trustee to WN. Following his death in 2016, Paul's dedication to WN continues through a charitable gift fund he and his wife, Ann, created at the Oklahoma City Community Foundation.

We were just awarded a fantastic opportunity to double all donations this fiscal year up to \$100,000!

We hope you will join us in taking advantage of this generous matching grant and help us to continue Paul's generous legacy by reaching hundreds more marginalized communities throughout the world.



Paul and Ann Milburn

In Memory of Charles Blackwood

March 20, 2020 – July 2, 2020

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Because of your support, millions of people are living better, healthier lives. You can help future generations too! Continue improving children's health and make other lasting changes in communities around the world with a legacy gift to World Neighbors. A gift in your will or trust, or naming World Neighbors as one of the beneficiaries of your retirement asset or life insurance ensures lives will be changed for years and years to come. Sustaining the future work of World Neighbors is one of the greatest gifts you can give. We are here to help you figure out the best plan for you and your legacy. To learn more about the many ways to make a legacy or planned gift, please contact Robert Lachance at 405-286-0805 or rlachance@wn.org.

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March 20, 2020 – July 2, 2020

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Mark and Becky Collins

Lucy Collins
Mark and Becky Collins

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IN HONOR OF:

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Vernon Ummel

OUR MISSION

World Neighbors inspires people and strengthens communities to find lasting solutions to hunger, poverty and disease and to promote a healthy environment.

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