

## Out of the Rubble ... Hope

On June 8-11, World Hunger Relief – Haiti will host Joeli Barison, a rice specialist from Madagascar, as he introduces Ferrier rice farmers to System of Rice Intensification (SRI). This innovative management approach is transforming the productivity and sustainability of rice production throughout Asia and parts of Africa and Latin America. The SRI workshop is only the first step in an exciting new multi-partner initiative to boost rice production in NE Haiti.

Three short months ago, as I made my first post-earthquake visit to Haiti, such hope seemed inconceivable. The world media quite accurately documented the devastation of buildings and the loss of life caused by the tragedy. However, as I visited with our Haitian partners in Ferrier, I was struck by how profoundly the earthquake had impacted even those whose homes were left undamaged.

Virtually everyone told stories of family members or close friends who died under the rubble. Some 1000 refugees settled in Ferrier and were being fed and housed by local residents. Children were afraid to return to the WHR-Haiti school for fear the concrete

buildings might collapse. Life in Haiti was already tough prior to January 12. It will be years before the Haitian infrastructure and economy returns to pre-earthquake levels.



**Ferrier woman processing locally-grown rice for sale in the market**

Addressing needs in rural communities like Ferrier is being promoted both as a way to support internally-displaced Haitians and as a solution to a long-term, chronic problem. By the time of the earthquake, chaotic urban migration had turned the capital of Port-au-Prince from a modest-sized city to a crowded, messy habitation for over three million people.

Experts involved in the reconstruction effort are increasingly encouraging the one million Haitians who have left Port-au-Prince to stay put in the countryside. The January 29 *Christian Science Monitor* reported: "As Haitian officials and international development experts start to envision Haiti's

reconstruction, 'decentralization' has become an ubiquitous rallying cry."

These thoughts guided my visit in February. Ferrier is one of the few areas of Haiti with under-utilized

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land resources. It includes the third largest flood-irrigated area in the country, and as such holds the potential to produce significant quantities of rice, the staple food of many Haitians. Rice production creates additional jobs as the crop is processed, transported, and marketed to consumers. I spent much of my visit slogging through rice fields, discussing these ideas with local farmers.

Unfortunately, the barriers to expanding Haitian rice production are huge. Competition by cheap, subsidized rice from the industrialized world destroyed the Haitian rice economy in the 1980s and 90s. As fields were abandoned, dams and irrigation canals fell into disrepair. The high cost of seed, fertilizer and tillage and the lack of credit have made Haitian rice farmers dependent on predatory lenders from the Dominican Republic.

One evening late in my visit, I told God that these challenges were simply too large for the meager means of WHRI. I had identified SRI and ox traction as the two interventions that seemed to address the most pressing constraints of the farmers I interviewed. However, I had no idea where we would find the resources to help them work on these issues. If God wanted us to respond, I told him we needed a miracle.

Upon returning to Waco, I began making phone calls. Much to my astonishment, Cornell University's Norman Uphoff, one of the world's leading proponents of SRI, was looking for partners to help introduce this approach to Haitian farmers. Dick Roosenberg, an internationally-recognized specialist in ox traction, was looking for ways for *Tillers International* to respond to the needs in Haiti and quickly agreed to visit Ferrier to provide advice on oxen and improved implements for rice production.

A Haitian organization, *GRADES-Nord*, agreed to manufacture the tools needed for SRI and asked us to partner with them in a large grant proposal to finance a revolving fund enabling Ferrier farmers to purchase ox teams. Finally, a retired scientist from the International Rice Research Institute agreed to provide consulting services in Ferrier and connect us with other international resources.

There are few times in my life that I have felt prayer answered so directly as in the events of these past three months. Rebuilding Haiti remains a monumental undertaking. Nonetheless, we step forward in the confidence that God is calling us to participate in this task. Pray with WHRI as we nurture these tender shoots of hope growing up through the tragedy and rubble.

Blessings, *Neil*

## Planting the Seeds for Change

I grew up in a small town in rural Minnesota, picking strawberries, fishing for walleye, and swatting mosquitoes. I didn't realize that few people spend their summers tending a small patch of kitchen garden, and that most kids my age didn't know what it is like to eat a tomato straight off the vine like an apple. I spent a lot of my summer days at my grandparents' house picking cucumbers, knitting with my grandma, going to Catholic Mass, and developing a taste for sauerkraut and horseradish.

When I left home, I went to Carleton College, where I studied biology and studio art. I was drawn to both of these because they helped me to develop skills of careful observation and the ability to ask good questions. I liked the tactile work within an intellectual construct that studio art provided, and was drawn to biology because it helped me realize that answering questions should prompt more questions. While my classmates were seeing science as the absolute answer to the ultimate questions, it was pushing me in the opposite direction - wondering about a Creator who could set the complex evolution of life in motion, sparking a depth of detail that we still can only wonder about.



**Hannah & Kelly, WHRI Produce Interns, celebrate an abundant harvest of turnips**

During this time, I worked a variety of student and summer jobs that informed my ideas about the way we interact with the world around us and introduced me to many interesting people: working in a garden center where I sold Christmas trees; cleaning in a bakery; sewing and altering costumes for Carleton's Theater Department; taking photographs during sporting events; helping photography students develop film and photographs in the darkroom; assisting in an endocrine research lab; surveying bird populations in a forest that had been clear-cut thirty years prior while living at a field station off the grid; and as a collections assistant for *Seed Savers Exchange*.

During my college years, I had the opportunity to interact with people from very different backgrounds and mindsets. I learned to talk about race and socio-economic status; I engaged in interfaith dialogue for the first time with people who practiced Islam, Judaism, Baha'i, Buddhism, and no religion. I spent one night a week at a "progressive Christian discussion group" and one night a week learning folk songs in the aural tradition.

I studied French, Spanish, and Arabic, and studied abroad twice. I was trained to facilitate comprehensive sexuality education classes, and helped facilitate peer education aimed at sexual violence prevention in our communities. I took classes about multi-cultural education and studied music from around the world. My best friends were Unitarian Universalists and Mennonites, people who believe in people, finding joy, non-violence, and comfort food. We took road trips and camped and found joy in the commonplace, the simple, and the kitschy.

From my time at WHRI (first as Livestock Intern, then Produce Intern), I will take with me experiences of nurturing a plant from seed; of placing squash in the hands of the parent who will cook it for the family that week; of managing a small business; practicing integrated pest management; and of learning how to hoe properly. I will also take the relationships I have formed with my community members and memories of baking bread, making music, celebrating comings and goings and milestones and millstones.

I spent the last four years trying to figure out where I am coming from, and now I have earnestly begun the "where I am going" part of that question. In the immediate future, I'm heading back to the Midwest, where my family still lives. I am returning to work for *Seed Savers Exchange* in Decorah, Iowa, to participate in their efforts to preserve heirloom seed varieties and pass along the knowledge to help others save them, too. I will help grow out old seeds that families have saved for generations so that they can be planted by future gardeners, and I will observe and record characteristics of all the varieties. My passion for genetic diversity in food and knowing the story behind things leads me there, where I will again be working outside, with my hands, and in Creation, trying to find joy and more pieces of the answer to where I am going.

*Kelly*



**Kelly Thompson in her element in the fields**

# WHRI Alumni & Intern Updates

## ◆ Samson Abukari (2009)

Back in Ghana, Samson writes: "By the wonderful grace of God everyone is doing well in the family. Our son, Jesse Wunyurilim Abukari, is growing." Recently appointed to his new job as Program Manager of *Creating Change Organization*, Samson supervises three Ghanaian staff and one Canadian volunteer, leading them to achieve the goals of Girl-Child education, rural education, and the provision of water facilities for rural communities and schools.

## ◆ Jean Ryther (1976-present)

Jean sends her thanks and her best to all who helped her celebrate her 82<sup>nd</sup> birthday event hosted by WHRI in January. She still lives just down the road from the Farm, continues to work some at the Baylor Library, and stays in close touch with all of us at the Farm. Check out the website in June for some of her pictures of the early years of WHRI she recently unearthed!

## ◆ Kelley Bruce (2005)

Former WHRI Master of Social Work Intern, Kelley writes: "I am still living in Sheffield, England. I am approaching my fifth year of working in Child Protection. It's a tough and incredibly demanding job, but I am so thankful to be working when so many people over here are unemployed. I work with children across a wide variety of ages and needs and have had opportunity to get experience in adoption, fostering, risk management and the court."

## ◆ Charlie & Brooke Ramsey (2003, 2008)

We are based in Kashmir, India, working with a local NGO (Non-Governmental Organization). Our current projects include micro-business development (with products related to aromatic and medicinal plants) and village emergency medical response. In 2011, we are adding a fish hatcheries project (rainbow trout) and women's micro-loan program. We would love to get *Water For All*, WHRI alum Terry Waller's organization, going in South Asia!

**World Hunger Relief, Inc.** is a tax-exempt, non-profit corporation registered with the State of Texas under the 501(c)(3) IRS status.

## Mission Statement

World Hunger Relief, Inc. is a Christian organization committed to the alleviation of hunger around the world.

God calls us to:

- ☐ **Train** individuals in holistic ministry that equips them to work with communities in developing sustainable farming techniques
- ☐ **Educate** those with an economic abundance on methods of conserving and sharing resources
- ☐ **Participate** in local and international sustainable development programs

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