



echo[®] news

#echofightshunger | volume 47 | issue 2



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cultivating an abundance • a different kind of 'fun in the sun'

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."

Joshua 1:9



Abram J. Bicksler, Ph.D., President/CEO

Dear friends, colleagues, and champions of ECHO:

Over the following pages, you'll read words like "adapt," "experience," "abundance," and "self-sufficiency." These words inspire me and remind me of the new vision, mission, and motivation statements that were ratified by our volunteer Board of Directors just a few months ago.

Our Vision: A transformed world honoring God

Our Mission: Strengthening the capacity of a diverse global network to defeat hunger and improve lives through sustainable food and agroecosystem strategies

Our Motivation: As Jesus first loved us, as agents of restoration, we seek to glorify God and love our neighbors.

It's an exciting time at our Centers around the world! As we launch the new Five-year Strategic Framework each Impact Center will live into the context and needs of their region. And, these four dynamic teams are leading the way for our fully-funded next Impact Team serving South Asia and the Central America & Caribbean Impact Center currently needing funding and planned for 2026.

Through it all, your generosity and support is what makes each story in ECHO News possible! You are paving inroads for biogas production in rural Africa and adapting to accidental buffalo watering holes in Laos. You are inspiring young people to serve God passionately at ECHO North America and you are defeating hunger and improving lives worldwide.

So, enjoy these pages, and may the stories and themes spur you on to serve!

For Christ and His Kingdom,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Abram J. Bicksler".

P.S. As you are inspired, please consider a gift to ECHO this spring that will inspire the next story, reach the next family, and make a life-changing difference for generations!

Strengthening the capacity of a diverse global network to defeat hunger and improve lives through sustainable food and agroecosystem strategies.



Cover photo:

Maasi women and men are building tubular biogas digestors to turn waste animal manure into clean cooking fuel in Tanzania.

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edited by **Danielle Flood**

Please share your comments about *ECHO News*. Write: 17391 Durrance Road, North Fort Myers, Florida, 33917, e-mail: info@echonet.org, or call: 239-543-3246.

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Tropical Agriculture Courses Offered in Asia and North America This Year

If you want to support missions globally, or be an advocate for creation care in the tropics then this is a class you don't want to miss.

Tropical Agriculture Development (TAD) is a 1-week course designed for missionaries and volunteers looking to engage communities with low-cost, high-impact agricultural ideas and techniques.

It has been designed to provide both theoretical knowledge and practical experience through farm-based trainings, live presentations, and consultations with our experienced staff.

The course will expose you to a breadth of topics and ideas with examples from the ECHO Farm, and a diverse set of tools to approach agricultural development effectively in tropical environments.

Spots are limited, and we encourage you to register soon to secure your place in this incredible experience. Together, we can take meaningful steps towards combating food scarcity and supporting families in need, echoing good news to all who hunger. 🌱

Moving Toward Energy Self-Sufficiency

By Ella Roberts, Storytelling Intern

Biogas model paves the way to energy self-sufficiency. Tubular digester trainings plant the seed for rural East African areas to be more financially successful and energy self-sufficient.

When he was 15 years old, missionaries in Likamba village begged Pastor Elirehema to feed their digester so that they would have methane to cook with. After that, he told himself one day, I'm going to have one of my own. For years he was convinced it was not possible. He thought it would cost too much, he wasn't knowledgeable on the process, and he wouldn't be able to maintain it. However, three years ago, at the age of 57, Pastor Elirehema received his own digester. His dream had finally come true.

For many, their dreams might not look like that of Elirehema. But for him and others in the Maasailand of Tanzania, having access to a biogas digester would save time, money, and increase crop productivity and yield.

This is just one example of the impact of research being done in the Appropriate Technology Center at ECHO East Africa. Thanks to ECHO's training, former trainee, now trainer Herry Charles was able to take back all that he had learned to his community. With the innovative research being done on agricultural biogas and its multifunctional benefits, the lives of those in rural areas of the East African region have been improved.

Biogas is a mixture of methane and carbon dioxide with small amounts of hydrogen, nitrogen, carbon monoxide and other compounds. This is produced when organic material decomposes under low-oxygen conditions. Biogas can be used as a fuel source for cooking, heating, producing light, or even to power a generator.

Interest in producing renewable energy with available resources, recycling and reusing materials, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions has increased across the world. Biogas addresses all of these concerns by using renewable inputs such as animal manure and producing gas as an output that can be used as a source of energy.



Right: There are many designs for methane digesters, ranging from large and complex to small and simple. Three models have been implemented at farmers' homesteads engineered by ECHO, with the tubular biogas digesters having been found to be the most suitable for rural areas of Tanzania.

Opposite: Pastor Elirehema and his wife are proud of their digester that provides clean cooking fuel for their family.



After quitting his job as a safari guide, Herry Charles dedicated his career to learning more about agriculture to make a difference in the world. He first heard about biogas in 2015 from Erwin Kinsey, Director of ECHO East Africa, who he had been working with at Global Service Corps as a training and logistics staff member in Tanzania. Not long after, he participated in an ECHO training in Tanzania where the tubular biogas digester technology was introduced.

“When we started working on the first tubular biogas prototype, he appeared on the scene and we opted him into the training,” Kinsey said. “Since then, he has gone forward with it as a trainer of others to share this useful technology. He’s the only trainee who took such an interest.”

Charles’ commitment and passion for ECHO and its mission were obvious as he went about sharing all that he had learned. In those early years, Charles worked on a consultant basis, giving out surveys, constructing more biogas digesters, and setting up devices to monitor the gas pressure to determine utilization. He attended biogas field trips, summits, and exchange visits to Kenya.

By 2020, Charles was hired on as a full-time staff member in the Appropriate Technology Center

as a biogas technician, where he receives mentoring from ECHO engineer Harold Msanya and teaches local communities about biogas, its benefits, and how they can begin gathering materials to build their own version of a tubular biogas digester.

–

Agricultural biogas is one of many multifunctional practices that can contribute positively to improving rural livelihoods across the world.

First, the dependency on firewood and charcoal (or other non-renewable energy sources) for domestic cooking is partially or completely eliminated. Households would typically use a major portion of income on the purchase of these

domestic energy sources adding to deforestation and land degradation. Additionally, producing biogas in the homestead reduces the workload of women and children who would typically spend 6-9 hours weekly gathering firewood and can lessen indoor smoke inhalation which disproportionately affects women and children.

Bio-slurry, another important output from biogas, is a source of manure that enhances production of crops and maintains soil productivity. Bio-slurry is broken down and acted upon by the microorganisms during the process of biogas synthesis, thus helping to

“Since then, he has gone forward with it as a trainer of others to share this useful technology – the only trainee who took such an interest.”

create a cleaner environment free of flies and odor. As such, biogas is considered to be a low-cost sustainable practice for small farmers in the region who typically have a reliable source of animal manure.

Having access to large plots of land allows for community members to house animals such as cattle and provides the space necessary to build digesters. However,

“If they travel to a different area, they have a chance to tell people how to live a good life here.”

the biggest challenge, Charles says, is the lack of income for the materials it takes to build a digester. Some may find work in the cities to provide for their families. The time it takes to gather the materials for a digester varies depending on the income and profit

from the crops from that year’s harvest.

The fluctuation of prices for bricks, cement, wires, and iron bars makes certain models expensive for the region. Models such as the IBC tank digester used in the U.S. may cost up to \$350. However, models such as the tubular digester used in the East African region require few materials. One instrumental resource readily available in the area is durable plastic, which is used to create the tubular shape that will eventually inflate with gas as the process of digestion occurs. Other materials include cement, sand or gravel, pipes, and a stove burner, all of which are locally available in rural areas of Tanzania.

Charles is now the lead trainer in an ECHO Tanzania initiative on biogas through one-day training programs, where he and other ECHO staff bring together mostly youth from

the surrounding villages to train them on biogas and its benefits. Through practical and theoretical training, the program teaches youth how to be technicians, build their own business, produce organic fruits and vegetables by using bioslurry, and become ambassadors for biogas.

As the communities continue to learn more about biogas methods and models, they can start gathering materials to build their own. Charles’ hope for this program is that as the youth become familiar with the technology, they will spread the word about how biogas can improve rural livelihoods.

“If they travel to a different area, they have a chance to tell people how to live a good life here and share information about biogas,” Charles said.

Now, other young people have the same desire to have their own biogas digesters as Pastor Elirehema had when he was a boy. Only this time, it is not just a dream. 🌱



Top: Pastor Elirehema fills his digester. Right: A biogas digester at a farmer’s home nearby ECHO is already providing cooking fuel for the family.

Cultivating an Abundance

By Leeann Estrada

From the Global Farm to the fields of Immokalee, ECHO's partnership with local organization "Cultivate Abundance" has produced an overflow of fresh fruits and vegetables to feed those in need and fulfill those who serve them.

If you met Rick Burnette in 1994, you would likely have found him working among farmworkers on a hillside in Thailand. The time he served there would become a reflection of what he does today: serving farmworkers in southwest Florida while ECHO continues alongside to help him accomplish these goals.

As ECHO network members, Rick and Ellen Burnette began an agricultural missions ministry in 1996 in northern Thailand. Later, in 2009, they established the ECHO Asia Regional Impact Center in Chiang Mai, serving there for four years. Upon their return to the United States, they noticed the desperate need for adequate nutrition among the local migrant worker population in Immokalee, Florida which led them to establish Cultivate Abundance in 2017. Ellen is the Executive Director while Rick serves as the Program and Technical Director.

ECHO donates fruit and vegetables each week, helping to provide nutritious, culturally-preferred food for approximately 400 clients each Friday at Misión Peniel, a social justice and advocate group for Immokalee farmworkers. Last year, almost three tons of produce were donated from ECHO for the Immokalee farmworker community.

Volunteers Chris and Sue process the hand-picked, intern-grown produce that is harvested on the farm. They sort, rinse, and

fill crates with each item, bundling certain veggies as necessary, and then load them up in the vehicle for transport to Immokalee.

Cultivate Abundance clients include Haitian, Mexican, and Central American descendants who now reside in Southwest Florida. They gladly receive an array of vegetables like rutabaga, Swiss chard, mustard greens, New Zealand spinach and fruits like mangos, starfruit, and papaya. Interestingly, certain kinds of leafy greens are preferred by certain people groups because of their use in their traditional cuisines. For example, Haitian clients always ask for more Haitian basket vine because that vegetable is popularly grown and eaten in Haiti.

So, no matter where you are in the world - be it the Thai highlands or Florida lowlands - there is always a need, and therefore, an opportunity. The Burnettes saw the need and took that opportunity 30 years ago and it has exemplified ECHO's hope against hunger to this very day. 🌍

Weekly donations are gathered for Cultivate Abundance donations. This week, seasonal eggplant and tomatoes were stars of the show.



what's happening



During an appropriate technology demonstration, participants of the South Sudan Joint Symposium received the description of the Maresha direct seeder plough.



ECHO Asia Staff Chao and Sombat traveled to the Thai-Myanmar border to support our partner KESAN (Karen Environmental and Social Action Network). Caption continued below.

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

Beersheba Multiplies Knowledge



ECHO West Africa Director Robert Sanou visits network partners from Beersheba in Senegal. Beersheba has trained hundreds of West Africans to bless the communities around them through sustainable agriculture.

g at ECHO



Hands-On in North America

“Amazing week of learning, experiencing, and fellowship!” shared Theresa. In early April, a group of 16 trainees gathered in Florida to learn more about faith, community development, agriculture, appropriate technology, seed saving and much more. The rocket stove above uses wood more efficiently saving fuel and time collecting fire wood.

West Africa Team Launches Seed Bank



The team in West Africa gathered to share seed banking techniques with lead farmers and start their first seed bank.



Biochar Burner By Boat



The ECHO Asia team introduced the “Do-All” Biochar Burner (Read more at: <http://edn.link/6x6qfx>) and loaded it on a bamboo raft to travel upstream to villages with poor road conditions.

A Different Kind of 'Fun in the Sun'

By Sarah Bakeman

For the past 30 years, John Hanson has brought groups of Indiana students to ECHO's Florida campus to volunteer mid-summer.

Two vans, two days, and a big trailer. That's what it takes for John Hanson to transport a group of more than 20 students on the thousand-mile drive from Indiana to Florida. Besides stopping for intermittent bathroom breaks and rest at an Atlanta church, the van charges on until it reaches ECHO Global Farm in Fort Myers. Here the student volunteers spend two weeks sweating through their sunscreen as they weed, mulch, and tackle any other farmwork ECHO employees present them with.

This summer's southward trek marks Hanson's 30 year of leading a short-term mission trip to ECHO.

Hanson realized his passion for serving while on a missions board over 30 years ago. He was sent to Nepal for three weeks to evaluate

missionaries but came back with a desire to do missions himself. As an educator, he wanted to include students. That's when a friend suggested ECHO.

"We want people to come to ECHO and gain a heart for the world. I hope the students have a lifelong interest in missions because of this trip." - John Hanson

"I had young people who needed a vision for the world, and ECHO is a great place to gain that," Hanson said. "There's contact with a lot of people at ECHO who have that vision for the world. They're involved in work that focuses on the needs of others globally."

The volunteers, known as the Indiana Work Team on campus, are primarily Indiana high school students of the Reformed Presbyterian denomination. When signing up for the trip, these students are well aware of what they're getting into. The sheet states "this is not a vacation, this a work trip," with "work trip" in bolded letters.

"It's advertised that it's not going to be a vacation," Hanson said. "It's going to be work in the sun, and the food won't be as good as mom makes."

Despite those bolded words, the trip continues to attract volunteers year after year. Some attendees are children of former Indiana Work Team volunteers. Others are visiting ECHO for the first time. There are some attendees, like Elisha Enas, who are returning for a sixth year.



Above: Intern Justin Lack prunes tithonia with the help of a work team member. Opposite: Eileen Doolan (left) poses with four Indiana Work Team volunteers. The group stopped to snack on some prickly pear from Doolan's area of research, the Semi-Arid region of the farm, before getting back to work.



"I love working outside, making a difference, and helping people out. I love ministry like that," Enas said as he took a break from prepping plots for planting. "It's a nice experience for me, coming down to Florida."

When the volunteers aren't completing big projects together, they split off to work with interns. ECHO intern Eileen Doolan spent a day with Enas and other volunteers, Jesse Burton and Mariah Larson, in the Semi-Arid region of the farm. The group weeded and mulched a sweet potato plot, seeded and mulched a jack bean plot, cleared the land to plant new trees, and ate some farm fresh prickly pear together. This was all done before the day was finished, leaving time for more chores.

Now in her third year of volunteering, Larson looks forward to the trip every year.

"I love the place and I love the people. The interns and staff have such cool stories and are so missions-oriented. It's great to hear their perspective," Larson said. "You build really strong connections with people when you're sweating together."

As the group cleared out plots, Doolan provided instructions, encouragement, and nostalgic songs and movie soundtracks from her phone speaker.

"Having the volunteers here is a blast. It reminds me of when I was a high school camp counselor. You're working with all these different

personalities," Doolan said. "It makes it so fun, and you just forget you're working."

In its 30 years, the Indiana Work Team has grown deep roots with ECHO. There are numerous legacies that are carried on every year - from Hanson's retelling of his favorite ECHO trip memories to the annual ECHO versus Indiana Work Team soccer game. In fact, Hanson has earned an honorary spot on the wall of ECHO interns, as his collective volunteer time has surpassed a year.

"We want people to come to ECHO and gain a heart for the world," Hanson said. "I hope the students have a lifelong interest in missions because of this trip."

This hope has been realized time and time again. Hanson has kept in touch with many Indiana Work Trip participants who now serve in missions both domestically and globally, primarily in Africa.

"We can bring young people to do the work in the hot part of the year," Hanson said. "ECHO provides us with a place to serve and grow spiritually. We benefit because we've learned about agriculture and we've learned about the world."

Whether it's a tradition or a first-time visit, ECHO is blessed by all those who choose to serve and join in the mission. For those wishing to bring about a transformed world that honors God, there are many ways to get involved at ECHO. Visit our website, echonet.org, and navigate to the volunteer page to learn more. 🌍

When the Buffalo Come, You Adapt

By Anna Pearson

A farm in Southeast Asia lost its source of clean water and was able to implement ECHO's four-barrel water filtration system made by hand.

When the neighbor's buffalo invaded their rainwater catchment pond, Michael Brant, his wife Mindy, and their farm staff were out of clean water. Fortunately, Michael knew there was a solution – they were not out of luck.

Michael, who runs an organic farm in Laos, had first learned about the four-barrel water filter design while searching for low-cost filters on YouTube. Months later, Michael and Mindy were

Originally developed by network partner Josh Kearns of Aqueus Solutions and identified by the team, biosand water filters are the most commonly used model. The four-barrel system adds an extra step to filter out chemical contaminants with the biochar barrel, which can absorb mercury, pesticides, acidic gasses, ozone, and nitrogen oxides out of the water.

According to the United Nations – which currently has 17 Sustainable Development Goals it developed in 2015 and hopes to achieve globally by 2030 – 829,000 people die annually from diseases directly attributable to unsafe water, inadequate sanitation, and poor hygiene practices. Billions of people lack access to these basic services.

“You’ll get sick from drinking dirty water, illnesses like diarrhea – but you don’t notice the chronic long term impacts of drinking contaminated water, which would be from those chemical contaminants you’re ingesting,” Elliot Toevs, ECHO’s Appropriate Technology Manager said. “You might not notice those impacts until 30 years later.”

Biochar filters are similar to the activated carbon filters that are used in common household items such as water pitcher filters or refrigerator filtration systems. Since this four-barrel system was introduced to ECHO in 2017, training on how to build it has picked up with the high demands for clean water solutions.

Although Michael was able to chase off the buffalo to another water source, he knew they would be back. The four other individuals living



excited to find out they could make their own when they visited the ECHO Asia Small Farm Resource Center for a tropical agriculture course. They knew they needed it on their farm.

The four-barrel water filter system begins with a gravel pre-filter, then treats the water with a slow sand biofilter and then a biochar absorber before being stored in the final barrel. The biosand filters have a biological layer on top of the sand, an aerobic and oxygen-loving layer to consume the bad microbes. This biological filtration keeps things like protozoa, cysts, and other organisms that cause sickness out of the water.

*“We have the experience now”
- Michael Brant*



and working on the farm needed the water for household use as well as watering the garden and fruit trees. The end of the dry season in Laos meant low water levels full of sediment, which were stirred up by the buffalo, as well as the animals making the pond their personal bathroom.

“I was both disgusted and amazed at the same time,” Michael said. “These animals were simply doing what God designed them to do, but we were so dependent on this pond that I didn’t care how happy they seemed.”

In order to get a clean water source, they needed to dig a well. They decided to use the water filter system in the meantime. Michael finished the plumbing and built an elevated tank stand, finishing the project in three weeks – just enough time for the filter to help clean their water supply until the well was drilled. Their new filter cleaned the water and made it usable again.

Weeks later usable well water was found 37 meters down, and the Brant’s farm water was safe from the buffalo. The ECHO water filtration system continues to be used in addition to the

well, filtering the well water for use at the farm. “The filtration system is a massive improvement for our farm,” Michael said. “It will serve us for years to come.”

The Brants hope to teach low-cost water filter designs outside of their farm and have gained confidence and hope from the tools and techniques they learned while at ECHO.

In addition to making their own biochar and water filter, Michael and Mindy have taught their farm employees how to make pesticide from tobacco and test germination using ECHO’s resources. They intend to start training in their local village to not only be an organic farm but also a resource for community outreach.

“Because of ECHO, we learned about building this four-barrel biochar water filter and what we can do here in our village,” Michael said. “We have the experience now.” 🌍

Opposite: When local buffalo invaded the pond used for household water, the Brants built a four-barrel water filtration after learning about it at ECHO Asia. Above: The Asiatic buffalo, is a large bovine native to India and Southeast Asia.

Resource Spotlight

Symposium Shared Lessons, Technologies, and Experience

At ECHO East Africa's recent symposium on appropriate technologies and renewable energy, presentations by innovators proposed solutions to several regional challenges. These presentations can be found on ECHOcommunity.org

1. Pioneering Innovations in Water Technology

Smart Irrigation: Efficient use of water for irrigation

A group of local engineers provide a solution for monitoring water use by an irrigation system operated remotely through mobile phones. A farmer can use a phone to send an SMS to the farm soil sensor to know if the field needs to be watered. If needed, the farmer can send another SMS to switch on the pump and deliver water.

Cleaning water through low cost Nanofilters

A Nanofilter is a water purification system invented by Askwar Hilonga, a professor at the Nelson Mandela African Institute of Technology. It provides safe water by removing bacteria and other microorganisms, excess fluoride, and arsenic, whose presence exceeds toxic thresholds in water systems all along the African Rift Valley. The filter was evaluated by the World Health Organization (WHO) and has a performance of 99.9999%.

Life Pumps by Greg Bixler

Life Pumps help tackle the world's water crisis by creating a durable, deep-reaching hand pump suitable for developing countries.

Greg's experience shows that frequent failures of water systems are sometimes costlier if the initial quality is compromised at the beginning.

2. Post-harvesting Technologies at Small-scale

Engineering Technology Hubs (ETHs)

A presenter from CAMARTEC demonstrated the way Engineering Technology Hubs (ETHs) have promoted appropriate strategies to finance agro-processing for industry and smallholder farmers.


The services provided by the hubs include building participant skills and creating awareness about different technologies. Affordable prices are set for farmers in order to use the technologies either by renting the equipment to do the work at their farms or bringing the crops to the hub.

Airtight Underground Grain Storage.

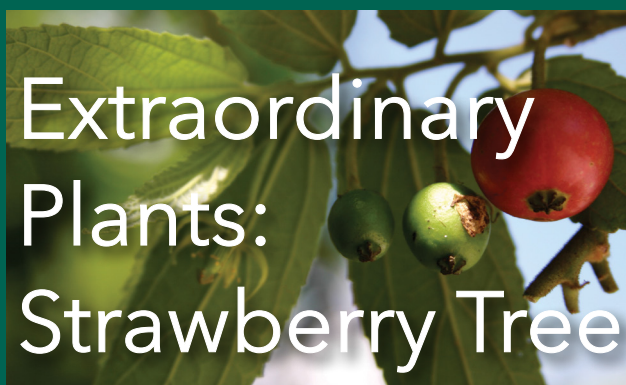
Storage pits offer the advantages of relatively easy construction, low cost, safety from theft, good thermal insulation, and protection from moisture, rodent attack and insect infestation.

3. Entrepreneurship: Bridging the Gap between Technical Knowledge and Application

For smallholder farmers and innovators in other fields, the challenge remains constant: getting their produce from the field without loss and into a reliable market for a stable source of income.

Local innovators often do not have access to be entrepreneurs even though it is just as important as creating innovations. Entrepreneurship has its own techniques and this session explained the steps and process of bridging the gap between knowledge and application. 

Learn more and share at: <http://edn.link/tzat23>



Extraordinary Plants: Strawberry Tree

The Strawberry Tree (*Muntingia calabura*), also known as Jamaica Cherry, is a multipurpose tree that quickly grows to 8 to 13 meters in height. The tree produces a small red fruit, but is largely valued for its wood. It is remarkably fast-growing for a tree having such hard wood. Fruits are produced only 1.5 to 2 years after seeding.

The wood of the Strawberry Tree is esteemed mostly for its use as firewood. The wood, when dry, ignites quickly, producing intense heat and a high flame with very little smoke. Julia Morton, in her *Fruits of Warm Climates*, writes that Jamaicans prefer the Strawberry Tree wood to any other wood when cooking. The wood is also strong and light in weight, making it easy to work with and durable for indoor carpentry use. The bark produces a fiber for twine and ropes. Enough cellulose is contained in the fiber to make it a potential source of paper pulp.

The one-centimeter round fruit is best when eaten fresh out-of-hand. The dark green leaves and white flowers that resemble strawberry blossoms make it an attractive addition to homes and gardens.

Native to southern Mexico, Central America, tropical South America, and several islands in the Caribbean, it is now cultivated in Hawaii, some Pacific islands, and Southeast Asia to the extent that many people consider it native.

The tree can be cultivated by cuttings or by the hundreds of small seeds in each fruit. 🌱

Is the IRS the beneficiary of your IRA?

Due to recent changes in the law on inherited individual retirement accounts (IRAs), your beneficiaries tax bill from any inheritance could be larger than you expect.

Unlike gifts of cash or property, a lump-sum gift of traditional IRA assets to a non-spouse may result in double taxation – an estate tax on you and an income tax on your beneficiary.

Special rules for inherited IRAs may force beneficiaries to take the money out sooner than they'd like. That can trigger an unwanted income tax obligation and even increase taxes on other income by pushing the beneficiary into a higher tax bracket. Fortunately, there are ways to avoid or reduce the potential tax bite on an inherited IRA. A financial advisor may help walk you through your options.

Several options are available if you would like your beneficiaries and ECHO to benefit from your IRA.

First, you may consider directing this asset into a testamentary charitable gift annuity or charitable remainder trust. Unlike the traditional 10-year payout term, a testamentary charitable gift annuity funded with IRA assets offers a lifetime or term certain income stream to your beneficiaries, tax savings to you, and a future gift to ECHO.

To give a gift today, consider avoiding taxes on the required minimum distribution and help fund ECHO's mission. Individuals 70 1/2 or older can direct up to \$105,000 to a charitable organization without increasing taxable income. You may also direct up to \$53,000 of this QCD to fund a one-time charitable gift annuity or charitable remainder trust. Both options provide a lifetime income stream to you and your spouse as well as a future gift to ECHO. 🌱



*This is not intended to be tax or legal advice. Please connect with your financial advisor.



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First South Sudan Symposium

A dream ten years in the making came true this February. 85 network members serving war-torn South Sudan came together to learn, share, and change lives.

After 24 hours of traveling from Arusha through Kenya and Uganda, the rough, dusty road welcomed ECHO's East Africa team to the border of South Sudan. Outside, they saw many destroyed houses with bullet marks on the plastered walls, and fields unplowed although the land seemed to have productive potential. All five in the car were quiet. They finally entered Juba 12 hours later.

The following day, the joint symposium with partner Tearfund started well, with eighty vibrant participants. Most attendees came from South Sudan. Throughout the three symposium days, the South Sudanese actively participated in every session. They asked many questions and interacted with presenters, seeking thorough understanding and hungry for more practical knowledge.

While some participants asked if this event could be conducted in each region of the country, we were encouraged that they saw relevance in sharing among themselves as well as from those visiting their country. Ever since the team arrived back in Arusha, they have received requests from participants seeking more knowledge and planting materials.

Though these partners are key to making life-changing impact across South Sudan, ECHO's catalyzing work is needed now more than ever. 🌱



Field Experience: Blessings and Lessons Learned

By Ella Roberts, Storytelling Intern

When their time in Fort Myers, Florida came to an end, John Yann and Chrissy Mahoney brought their newly acquired knowledge and techniques to Chiang Mai, Thailand where they immersed themselves in a rich culture of people and agriculture for six months.

John Yann ran through his notes one last time as he pulled up the presentation he prepared on the System of Rice Intensification (SRI), a concept he became familiar with as an intern at ECHO Florida. He stood in front of a group of eager community members who listened intently, taking notes and asking questions often. Less than a year ago, he was in their shoes, learning concepts such as SRI. Now, in a suburb on the outskirts of Chiang Mai, John is putting these theoretical concepts into practice and seeing the impacts these methods have first-hand.

While every student in the ECHO Internship Program stays on the Fort Myers campus for close to 12 months, many have the opportunity

to extend their experience with the ECHO six-month field experience. This partnership allows interns to travel to one of ECHO's three impact centers where they spend six months in the field, using their learned skills, techniques, and knowledge to better serve the community they are in. This opportunity fully immerses interns into a new country, its language(s), culture, cuisine, and people.

In June 2023, Chrissy and John left for ECHO Asia and arrived at a farm located in a suburb on the outskirts of Chiang Mai. Their first three months were spent getting acclimated to their new surroundings, meeting their host families and the ECHO staff they'd be working with, exploring Thailand, and taking language classes. To become familiar with the different areas of the farm, Chrissy and John rotated where they worked and who they worked with each week.

The two quickly realized how practical and applicable their training at ECHO Florida would be in Thailand.

"I think [the ECHO internship] made the culture shock a lot easier because I wasn't learning a new job and culture at the same time," Chrissy said. "I just had to focus on culture and language, and that helped so much."



Right: Chrissy's experience with Thailand's ecology was just as diverse as her experience with its people. Planting SRI rice at a training in Thailand was a highlight.

Opposite: John reinforced the techniques he learned at ECHO Florida, especially when working with black soldier flies. He taught these techniques during trainings, and was delighted by the excitement everyone came with, even getting invited to visit their villages in the future.



John was assigned to work with black soldier flies, something he became familiar with while at ECHO Florida. His time was spent sifting through compost to find black soldier fly grubs, which can be converted from organic waste into high-quality nutrients for animal feed and residue fertilizer for soil amendment.

"I was able to face the real challenges that I had only ever heard about or was taught and realized not every method or practice is as perfect and seamless as it seems, but you can still pick out something from there," he said.

Chrissy spent much of her time working alongside the hospitality coordinator, preparing a newly acquired property as a conference center. From October to December, three conferences were held there.

They also completed writing projects on several different topics, gave tours, and participated in training sessions with the community.

Both were amazed by the people they met and how welcomed they felt.

"People understand each other through the eyes and the heart. This is crucial for building relationships, and for international and community development," Chrissy said. "I learned about myself and the diversity of people God has made. At the same time, I was amazed at the similarities I

shared with those who were raised in, in many ways, an opposite culture from me."

"I think the Lord especially gives us different paths and communities than we expect and different things to do and lessons to learn than we ever imagined," Chrissy said.

"I would definitely recommend it to anyone who has come out of ECHO that's even remotely considering using their training in an international or missions context." – John Yann

Outside of their work on the farm, Chrissy and John had many opportunities to explore the country of Thailand with ECHO staff, walk through local markets, hold Monday morning devotions, and play friendly games of soccer.

"I would definitely recommend [the six-month field experience] to anyone who has come out of ECHO that's even remotely considering using their training in an international or missions context," John said.

Since arriving back home, Chrissy and John have had time to reflect on their time in Thailand and have begun to consider what their next steps in missions and agriculture might look like. John works at a nursery in St. Petersburg, Florida, and is considering working with a missions organization he connected with while in Chiang Mai. Chrissy works for a forest service tree nursery and seed bank in California and plans to return overseas for long-term missions work. 🌍