



Strengthening and Growing the ECHO Network

*An Internship That
Became a Calling*

*From Interns to
Influencers: How
the ECHO Network
Multiplies*

The Network in Action

*How ECHO
Strengthens the
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A Letter from ECHO's President

In agriculture, growth rarely happens quickly or all at once. It begins with careful preparation, patient tending, and trust that what is planted will grow and produce in time. Farmers understand that healthy harvests result from long-term attention, not short-term effort.

ECHO's incredible global network has grown in much the same way.

For more than four decades, ECHO has walked alongside farmers, practitioners, pastors, and partners around the world, sharing knowledge and learning together. In this issue, you will see two important ways that growth takes shape within the ECHO network of over 20,000 organizations and individuals in nearly every country on earth. You will meet interns who are discerning their calling and deepening their ability to serve through hands-on learning, and you will see the network in action through relationships that connect people, organizations, and communities across regions. Together, these stories show how learning and trust develop over time and continue to bear fruit and do what ECHO does best: connect people to agricultural ideas and each other!

This Spring issue of ECHOnews also marks the introduction of a new season for ECHO, which we call Fully Forward Together. Fully Forward Together provides a clear direction for how ECHO will continue to serve in a rapidly changing world, building on what God has already been doing through the ECHO



Dr. Abram Bicksler, President and CEO of ECHO, pictured at the ECHO North America Impact Center in Fort Myers, Florida.

network. It brings focus to our shared identity, our purpose, and the priorities that will guide our work in the years ahead.

At the heart of Fully Forward Together are five global goals. This issue highlights Global Goal 1: Strengthen and Grow the ECHO Network. This goal reflects a conviction ECHO has held from the beginning, that lasting change comes through people and relationships. When knowledge is shared through trust and long-term connection, it multiplies far beyond any single place or moment.

As we move forward together, I am encouraged by the faithfulness of those who make up the ECHO network. Their lives and work remind me that when we invest patiently and walk humbly, God brings growth in His time.

Thank you for being part of the ECHO network and for walking with us into this next season. I am grateful for your continued partnership as we move fully forward together.

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



ECHO's Five Global Goals

To guide ECHO's work in a complex and changing world, the Fully Forward Together framework identifies five global goals that shape how we serve farmers, practitioners, churches, and communities. These goals are rooted in ECHO's vision, a transformed world honoring God, and reflect our commitment to stewardship, partnership, and the dignity of all.



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Goal One: Strengthen and Grow the ECHO Network

Invest in people and relationships to expand the reach, diversity, and connectedness of the ECHO network.



Goal Two: Increase the Network's Capacity to be Effective

Provide training, tools, and follow-up that support deeper learning and practical application, leading to measurable impact.



Goal Three: Advance Global Seed Banking

Strengthen seed systems that preserve biodiversity and improve resilience for farming communities.



Goal Four: Champion Agroecology

Promote whole-system food strategies that restore land, improve nutrition, strengthen livelihoods and care for creation.



Goal Five: Partner in Biblical Holistic Mission with the Global Church

Walk alongside the global Church to serve communities in ways that address physical, spiritual, and social needs.

When knowledge is shared through trust and long-term connection, it multiplies far beyond any single place or moment.

This Issue's Focus: Goal One

How the ECHO network grows through people and partnerships, shared through stories of connection, formation, and long-term relationship.





Patrick Trail, Director of ECHO Asia, speaks with a farmer during a visit to northern Thailand.

An Internship that Became a Calling

On any given day in Chiang Mai, Thailand, Patrick Trail can be found walking the grounds of the ECHO Asia Impact Center, talking with staff, meeting with partners, and listening as ideas are exchanged across cultures and contexts. The work is relational. The pace is steady. The impact stretches far beyond what can be seen in a single moment.

It is hard to imagine now, but Patrick's journey with ECHO began not with a long-term plan for Asia, but with a simple visit.

As a graduate student passionate about agriculture and mission, Patrick attended an agronomy conference in Florida. One of the optional site visits was to the ECHO Global Farm in Fort Myers. What he encountered there immediately resonated.

“Upon learning of ECHO,” Patrick recalls, “I got so excited, knowing that I had just found the organization I was made for, an organization marrying together my two God-given passions of faith and farming.”

At the time, Patrick already knew he wanted to serve small-scale farmers and contribute to improved

food security through agricultural development. Discovering that ECHO had been doing this work faithfully for decades felt like an answered prayer. Patrick applied for the internship at the North America Impact Center, eager to gain hands-on experience in tropical agriculture alongside practitioners who had spent years walking with farmers in challenging contexts.

Just as formative was ECHO's philosophy of offering options rather than solutions. Rather than prescribing answers, ECHO encourages practitioners to listen and respect local knowledge while sharing possibilities farmers can adapt for themselves.

“[ECHO's philosophy] forces us to place the focus back on the relationship with the people we serve,” Patrick explains. “The men and women we serve often have extensive traditional knowledge and ingenuity that sometimes need exposure to new possibilities. They often need a helping hand instead of a handout.”

During the internship, Patrick also worked in the monsoon demonstration area, helping reshape the landscape and plant crops in a project that is still used today.

As part of the internship, participants could attend an international ECHO conference. Patrick chose the 2015 ECHO Asia Agriculture and Community Development Conference in Thailand.

During the visit, he met Dr. Abram Bicksler, who was then serving as Regional Director for ECHO Asia. Not long afterward, Patrick accepted a two-year role in Thailand as a Research and Technical Associate, assuming it would only be a short season.

Patrick has now served with ECHO Asia for nearly a decade. During that time, he met his wife, who was also serving in Thailand, and together they have welcomed two children, both born there. Over the years Patrick served as a technical advisor, agricultural trainer, and Agricultural Extension

Manager, building relationships with staff and partners across Asia. In 2023 he stepped into the role of Director of ECHO Asia after serving for two years on the interim leadership team.

Patrick is quick to emphasize that his leadership is not about position or individual achievement. He often notes that his role is made easier by the incredibly dedicated and talented team around him. Many staff members and partners have worked together for years, creating stability and trust as the Impact Center has grown.

Patrick sees the power of the ECHO network most clearly in its multiplying effect. By serving practitioners, missionaries, pastors, and development workers, ECHO trains people who then go on to train others, adapting what they have learned to their own communities.

“It mirrors the approach of Jesus himself,” Patrick reflects. “He chose to pour into His twelve disciples who would go on to impact many.”

In many ways, Patrick's story reflects the heart of Strengthening and Growing the ECHO Network. An internship became a calling. Training became leadership. And one person's yes became part of a much larger story God continues to write.



Patrick Trail pictured at the ECHO Asia campus in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

From Interns to Influencers:

How the ECHO Network Multiplies

ECHO East Africa

At the ECHO East Africa Impact Center in Arusha, Tanzania, internships are deeply rooted in local context. Many interns come from the region itself, bringing with them a strong understanding of local cultures, farming systems, and community needs. The internship program emphasizes hands-on learning, agricultural experimentation, and practical training that interns can carry directly back into their communities.

Interns work alongside staff on demonstration plots, seed banking, trainings, and outreach to farmers, with a strong emphasis on learning by doing. Through the Appropriate Technology Department, interns are also encouraged to think creatively, developing and testing innovative ideas that benefit both local communities and their own professional growth. Participation in staff-organized trainings further strengthens interns' skills, exposure, and confidence as they learn from experienced practitioners.

For many interns, this experience is not a step away from home, but a step deeper into service where they already belong.

INTERN SPOTLIGHT:

Mussa's Journey from Theory to Practice

Before joining ECHO East Africa, Mussa Philipo describes himself as a university graduate with "strong theoretical knowledge, especially in agriculture and rural development, but with limited hands-on experience in organic farming and in creating real impact within communities." He understood agricultural concepts in classrooms and books, but he had not yet learned how to translate that knowledge into practical solutions that could serve farmers well.

That began to change in March 2024, when Mussa joined ECHO East Africa in Arusha, Tanzania as an intern.

From the start, the experience reshaped how he understood agriculture and community engagement. At ECHO, learning was not confined to instruction but gained through observation, practice, mistakes, and continuous reflection. Mussa received hands-on training in sustainable agriculture, biogas management, compost making, garden establishment, vermiculture, perennial vegetables, and innovation. He also learned the importance of cover crops such as Canavalia and Lablab in improving soil fertility, conserving moisture, and strengthening farming systems for smallholder farmers with limited resources.

One of the most transformative lessons for Mussa was compost making. "I learned how locally available materials, farm and kitchen waste, could be turned into organic fertilizer," he explains. "This completely changed my perception of waste and soil health." Vermiculture further deepened that understanding by showing how natural biological processes can enhance soil fertility in simple and cost-effective ways.

Beyond technical skills, Mussa says ECHO East Africa taught him the value of sharing knowledge. During his internship, he engaged with farmers, staff, and community members, explaining practices such as composting, vermiculture, cover cropping, and garden establishment. He participated in forums and events,

including Farmers Day, where he helped demonstrate practical skills and exchange ideas.

"Knowledge sharing is not a one-way process," Mussa reflects. "As I shared what I had learned, I was also learning from others their local knowledge, their challenges, and the innovative ways they adapt to environmental changes." That mutual learning strengthened his ability to communicate clearly and apply solutions that fit community realities.

After completing his internship, Mussa began putting those lessons into practice. At Baobab Home, he introduced vermiculture production, a new initiative for the organization. Later, as Farm Manager at Msonge Organic Farm in Zanzibar, he applied compost-making techniques to improve soil fertility and crop productivity and promoted perennial vegetables, such as chaya, as a sustainable and nutritious crop for long-term food security. The farm became not only a production space but also a place of learning where sustainable agriculture principles are practiced daily.

Today, Mussa continues this work with Hanns Richard Neuman Stiftung, where he trains farmers in farming as a business, sustainable agriculture, and responsible resource use. The knowledge first practiced during his internship now moves outward through the farmers and communities he serves.

Looking back, he reflects, "My time at ECHO East Africa was more than an internship; it was a start-up for transformation." It marked what he describes as "the shift from being a graduate with mainly theoretical knowledge to becoming a practitioner who applies, shares, and continuously learns from the community."

What began as a season of learning has become a path of purpose and service. As Mussa continues to share what he has learned, the impact extends beyond one internship, strengthening relationships, deepening local capacity, and contributing to a growing network of practitioners committed to sustainable agriculture and resilient communities.

Below: Mussa (right) makes compost during his internship at ECHO East Africa.



"My time at ECHO East Africa was more than an internship; it was a start-up for transformation."



Jidapha (seated, second from right) with a group during her internship at ECHO Asia.

ECHO Asia

The Asian National Apprenticeship Program

At ECHO Asia in Chiang Mai, the Asian National Apprenticeship Program invites local Asian practitioners to deepen their knowledge and skills in agricultural community development.

This eight-week, hands-on learning experience begins with participation in the six-day Intro to Tropical Agriculture and Development Course, followed by additional weeks of practical training and mentorship. Apprentices gain exposure to simple, low-cost agricultural options suitable for smallholder farmers, including natural farming, seed banking, appropriate technology, and community engagement.

The program emphasizes both technical understanding and relational learning. Apprentices participate in field trials, demonstrations, and trainings while engaging with peers from across the region. Through shared learning and cross-cultural collaboration, they strengthen their ability to serve farming communities in diverse and rapidly changing contexts.

By investing in local leaders who will return to their own communities, the Asian National Apprenticeship Program contributes to a growing network of practitioners committed to sustainable agriculture and long-term impact.

INTERN SPOTLIGHT

Bridging Language and Learning

During her fourth year as a university student, Jidapha was required to complete an internship as part of her studies. She wanted more than a requirement. She was looking for an opportunity to grow beyond the classroom and contribute meaningfully to society. That search led her to ECHO Asia.

What began as a university placement soon became a formative experience that shaped both her professional direction and personal values.

At ECHO Asia, Jidapha served primarily in translation and interpretation. She translated documents and assisted during agricultural training sessions for international participants. The work stretched her beyond her comfort zone, introducing unfamiliar technical vocabulary related to sustainable and organic agriculture. As she navigated these challenges, she gained a deeper understanding of sustainable farming practices and the role communication plays in development work.

Translation became more than a technical task. It became a bridge between practitioners, communities, and supporting partners. It required careful listening, cultural awareness, and the ability to convey ideas clearly and accurately.

Her internship also introduced her to the broader realities of community development and environmental stewardship. She encountered not only agricultural techniques, but the values behind them, including resourcefulness, sustainability, and respect for local knowledge.

Reflecting on that season, Jidapha shares: “Through my internship at ECHO Asia, I learned that agriculture is not just about food production, but about dignity, sustainability, and hope for communities.”

After graduating, Jidapha joined the Highland Development Foundation, an international

“Through my internship at ECHO Asia, I learned that agriculture is not just about food production, but about dignity, sustainability, and hope for communities.”

development organization working in highland and remote areas. In her current role, she communicates stories of agricultural innovation, sustainable livelihoods, and environmental stewardship to funding partners.

She explains: “The skills and knowledge I gained from ECHO have been essential in translating farmers’ experiences and project impacts accurately and meaningfully.”

Community development, she notes, is complex and deeply interconnected, involving environmental, economic, spiritual, and land-related realities. Many topics require patience and sensitivity. Through continued learning, field visits, collaboration with experienced colleagues, and engagement with communities and donors, she has grown both professionally and personally.

What began as a university requirement has become a path of service. Through language and careful communication, Jidapha now helps connect communities, practitioners, and partners across contexts. In doing so, she contributes to something larger than her individual role, a growing network strengthened through trust, shared learning, and long-term relationships.

Her journey reflects the heart of Global Goal 1: strengthening and growing the ECHO network by investing in people whose influence extends far beyond a single internship, carrying knowledge forward into new places and new partnerships.



ECHO North America

The ECHO North America internship program at the Global Farm in Florida prepares interns for service in diverse contexts around the world. Interns come from a wide range of backgrounds and often arrive with a desire to serve domestically or internationally through sustainable agriculture.

The program combines hands-on agricultural training,

exposure to tropical agroecological systems, and mentorship from experienced staff. Interns learn not only technical skills, but also ECHO’s approach to offering options, honoring local knowledge, and working through relationships.

For many, this internship becomes a launching point into serving a community somewhere in the world through agriculture, ranging from demonstration farming to academia.

INTERN SPOTLIGHT

How Lauren Carried ECHO’s Lessons Across Borders

During her time at ECHO, Lauren immersed herself in sustainable agriculture, learning nursery management, grafting, pruning, and tropical plant production. Just as importantly, she experienced the global community that gathers around ECHO’s mission.

She shares:

“I enjoyed learning about sustainable agriculture and how agricultural communities around the world can be empowered to transform themselves from within while preserving and rehabilitating the soil and nature around them. I also loved being able to connect with visitors and agriculturalists from around the world.”

After her internship, Lauren continued for a year as a Propagation Assistant, strengthening her practical skills and deepening relationships within the ECHO network.

Those lessons soon carried her abroad.

She spent three months in Central Asia assisting two farms with weed control, grafting, harvesting peaches and apples, and training temperate fruit trees for improved production. During that time, she also visited

the farm of a long-term ECHO network member she had first met through ECHO, turning a conference connection into real collaboration.

Reflecting on her experience, she says:

“Frequently, I found that any new experience or interaction that I had in the country, even as simple as buying groceries or walking down the street, I would remember stories people had told me at ECHO. My expectations nearly exactly lined up with reality.”

After returning to the United States, Lauren remained connected to the network. Through relationships formed at an ECHO conference, she connected with the Fellowship of Christian Farmers and is now exploring opportunities in agricultural extension and sustainable agriculture, including potential service in hurricane recovery efforts in Jamaica.

What began as an internship has grown into a life shaped by global relationships and practical service. Her journey reflects how investing in one intern strengthens connections across borders and contributes to a growing network serving farmers and communities worldwide.

Left Page: A farm in Central Asia photographed by Lauren during her visit.

Below: Lauren during her internship at ECHO North America.





When Learning Travels

An internship is never only an internship. It is a season of questions, of soil under fingernails, of watching carefully and trying again. It is the quiet work of becoming that is shaped by mentors, strengthened through practice, and formed within community.

Yet learning rarely stays where it begins. What is discovered in one place often finds new expression in another. An intern returns home carrying more than skills. Conversations continue across borders. Techniques tested in one context are adapted thoughtfully in another. Seeds are shared. Ideas are translated. Relationships deepen.

Over time, what began in a training plot becomes a field in Larama. What started as careful translation becomes understanding between partners. What was practiced in Florida takes root in Central Asia. Learning moves through people, shaped by their language, culture, and calling.

This is how the ECHO network grows. Not simply through programs or events, but through steady investment in people. Not through quick results, but through trust built gradually and tended with care. Knowledge travels at the pace of relationship. It is carried in shared meals, long conversations, and the patient work of listening. It takes root in local soil and grows in ways no single training could predict.

As it travels, learning does not lose its integrity. It adapts without losing its purpose. It multiplies without losing its source. What begins as one person's season of formation often becomes part of a much larger story.

On the following pages, you will see this movement unfolding — relationships formed years ago bearing fruit today, gatherings that strengthened bonds across regions, and partnerships that continue to deepen season after season.

In the ECHO network, learning is meant to travel.

The Network in Action: *Growing Hope Through Shared Knowledge in Guatemala*

When Casa del Alfarero, known as Potter's House Association, first began its work in Guatemala in 1986, the calling was clear. Born out of a desire to serve children living and working in a garbage dump in Guatemala City, the Christ-centered organization committed itself to walking alongside children and families facing extreme poverty, offering care that honored their dignity and value before God. They called the children they served "Treasures."

Over the years, Casa del Alfarero expanded its work through community centers across the western highlands, eastern, and central regions of the country, providing integrated programs in education, health and nutrition, family development, microenterprise, and community development. Yet as the ministry grew, new questions emerged. How could they strengthen nutrition programs while keeping food affordable? How could families gain skills that supported long-term sustainability?

In 2019, two staff members from Casa del Alfarero, Margarita Rivas and Mandy Herrera, visited ECHO in Florida after a friend and donor encouraged them to explore the network. At the time, the organization was launching a new project in Chiquimula and was seeking practical guidance and connection. What followed was not a single training, but the beginning of an ongoing relationship. That visit opened doors. Through ECHO, Casa del Alfarero staff participated in trainings, shared their

own experience, and began forming relationships across the network. Later that year, ECHO supported three staff members in attending a regional training in Costa Rica alongside other practitioners, creating space for peer learning and collaboration.

In the years that followed, ECHO continued to walk alongside Casa del Alfarero. From 2019 through 2021, staff received nutrition training and support in standardizing practices, improving food baskets, and learning creative ways to encourage behavior change through play. Network connections also offered ideas for water conservation and ways to diversify diets while keeping costs manageable.

Perhaps most significantly, these relationships helped Casa del Alfarero take a step they had not initially planned. Through knowledge shared by ECHO and connections made across the network, the organization launched an agroecological model garden that now integrates vegetables, medicinal plants, and organically raised poultry.

Today, this garden is more than a food source. It is a place of learning.

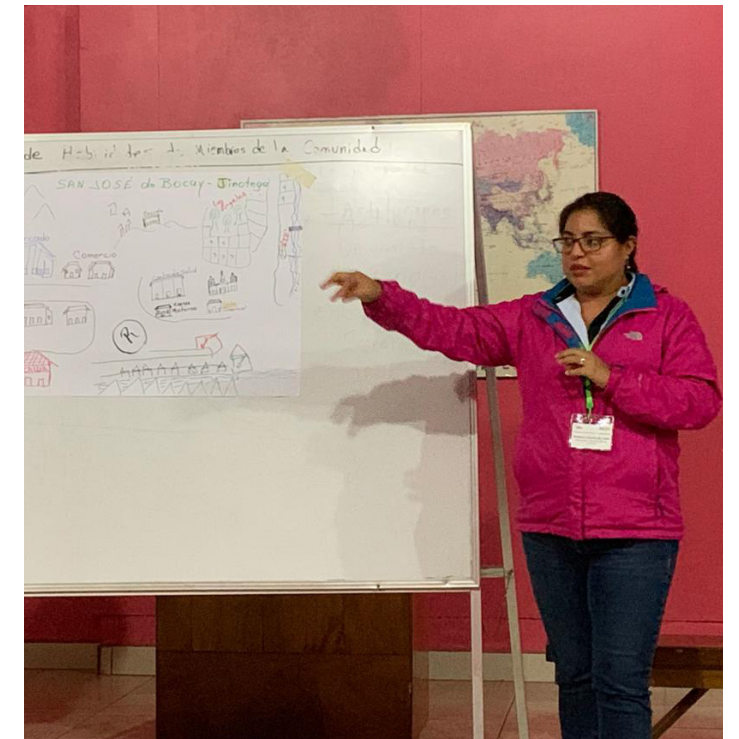
Children and youth are trained in nutrition, agriculture, poultry raising, and small business skills. They learn how to produce healthy food, make natural fertilizers, use medicinal plants, and manage surplus produce. The result has been improved nutrition, better health, increased family income, and a renewed sense of confidence and purpose.

As Anabella Álvarez, Casa del Alfarero's Program Manager, reflected at a gathering in Guatemala City, "Through this network of contacts with ECHO we received training from the University of Agriculture in Honduras during the pandemic. The knowledge gained through the ECHO network allowed us to launch this agricultural project. There truly is a benefit in belonging to a network like ECHO, because it gives us a wide range of organizations we can partner with and learn from as we face our own challenges."

This story is what Strengthening and Growing the Network looks like in practice. It is not a single solution delivered from the outside, but relationships built over time. It is knowledge shared freely, adapted locally, and multiplied through people who know their communities best.

Through the ECHO network, Casa del Alfarero continues to grow hope, rooted in faith, community, and shared learning.

"There truly is a benefit in belonging to a network like ECHO, because it gives us a wide range of organizations we can partner with and learn from as we face our own challenges."



Top: Anabella Vides of Casa del Alfarero presenting during a training in Costa Rica.

Bottom: Margarita Rivas and Anabella Vides of Casa del Alfarero with Kathy Bryson of Servants in Faith and Technology (SIFAT) during a training in Costa Rica.



How One ECHO Connection Continues to Bear Fruit

by Laurana Gonzalez

In 1999, ECHO North America planted a seed in the heart of Larry Smoak when he served as a Missionary in Residence and learned the SALT technique, Sloping Agricultural Land Technology, alongside ECHO staff. That seed soon took root just outside La Ceiba, Honduras. More than two decades later, it continues to bear fruit.

For over 20 years, Larry has faithfully implemented SALT while partnering with smallholder farmers working the steep mountain slopes on which their families depend. What began as a learning opportunity through the ECHO network grew into a lifelong ministry grounded in sustainability, relationship, and trust in the Lord.

Years later, another ECHO connection strengthened that work. Dr. Grace Ju Miller, now Director of ECHO North America, brought a volunteer team to serve alongside the Smoaks at their ministry, Great Oaks International. Together, they implemented SALT barriers on the property, reinforcing both the land and the relationships formed through the ECHO network. In 2026, Dr. Miller returned to that same property, this time as the director of the very site that first shared the technique with Larry. What began as training had come full circle. The network that once invested in him was now strengthened through decades of shared learning and renewed partnership.

Neno (center, in red) is a smallholder farmer employed by the Smoaks. On their farm, the Smoaks use the SALT technique and strive to model fair wages and healthy working conditions, a challenge for many smallholder farmers.

Over the years, many stories have emerged from the Smoaks' ministry. One of the most striking came during an extended drought that lasted several years. During two of those years, neighboring farmers lost their crops entirely. Yet the Smoaks' fields continued to produce, protected by SALT barriers that conserved soil and water on the steep slopes.

The results drew attention. Farmers began asking questions.

Still, success brought its own challenges. Healthy crops sometimes led to loss through theft, revealing another reality faced by farmers living with limited resources. Larry and his wife, Allison, often speak about how difficult it can be to introduce new practices when the margin of error is a matter of survival.

As Larry explains: "Few can bear the risk of innovation, and most smallholder farmers cannot because of the slim margin of error."

For many farmers, the question is not whether a method might work, but what happens if it does not. When a single harvest determines whether a family eats, experimentation can feel impossible.

This is where the heart of ECHO becomes clear. The network comes alongside farmers, sharing knowledge and helping bear risk together. Through long-term relationships and shared learning, space is created for innovation without placing livelihoods in jeopardy. In this way, the work reflects the call of Scripture to "bear one another's burdens" (Galatians 6:2).

Trust is not easy when so much is at stake. Yet over time, farmers have seen that careful stewardship of the land, combined with faithful partnership, can lead to resilience. What began as a technique has become a testimony of God's provision and the strength that grows through community.

Today, in 2026, the Smoaks continue their ministry with SALT at the center and Christ as the foundation. One of

their team members, Neno, a local farmer raised in the surrounding community, now works alongside Larry, implementing sustainable practices while modeling fair wages and dignified working conditions.

What began as a single connection through ECHO has grown into decades of collaboration and faithful service. Techniques have been shared. Fields have been strengthened. Relationships have deepened.

This is how the ECHO network grows, not only through new connections, but through roots that deepen over time, bearing fruit season after season.



Employees of the Smoaks (in blue shirts). One is pursuing a degree in environmental engineering, while the other serves his community as a teacher.

Faith in Farming:

How ECHO West Africa Strengthens the Network Across Borders

This January, ECHO West Africa hosted a Faith and Farming gathering that brought together 70 participants from more than 12 countries. Pastors, agricultural practitioners, and ministry leaders traveled from across the region not only to learn new techniques, but to connect with one another.

In West Africa, agriculture and ministry are often intertwined. Many pastors are also farmers. When crops fail, families feel it immediately. When soil is restored, hope returns visibly.

Over several days, participants engaged in practical training on agroecological methods adapted to West African conditions. Demonstrations on composting, organic fertilizer preparation, and soil conservation addressed challenges such as rising input costs, degraded soils, and unpredictable rainfall.

But the gathering was about more than techniques. It was about strengthening relationships.

Pastors exchanged stories of ministry in rural villages. Practitioners compared approaches across climates and cultural contexts. Farmers asked hard questions about risk and survival. New connections formed between leaders who might otherwise never have met.

Throughout the year, ECHO West Africa hosts trainings and workshops that connect practitioners and

church leaders across the region. When participants return home from gatherings like Faith and Farming, the knowledge spreads through churches, villages, and farmer groups, multiplying practical solutions and encouragement across the region.



Participants gather during the Faith and Farming event hosted by ECHO West Africa in January 2026.

A Pastor's Field Becomes a Network Testimony

Etienne Millogo and his wife H el ene serve as a pastoral couple in Larama, Burkina Faso. Like many farmers in their area, they once relied on chemical fertilizers that were difficult and expensive to obtain. When floods damaged much of their crop early in the season, and without access to those inputs, they faced a difficult decision.

After participating in training through ECHO West Africa in 2025, Etienne returned home with new ideas. He had learned about the FFF technique and organic fertilizer preparation, approaches designed for smallholder farmers working within tight margins.

Instead of purchasing chemical fertilizer, Etienne and H el ene chose to apply a 10-day organic fertilizer and implement the FFF technique on their corn fields. The decision drew skepticism.

“Many people thought we were crazy,” Etienne recalls. “They would walk by, look at our field, and sometimes even laugh at us.”

Yet they continued.

On just 0.75 hectares of land, they harvested 25 bags of 100 kilograms of corn. Without the techniques they had learned, Etienne estimates they would not have harvested even five.

With gratitude, he shares: “ECHO’s training saved our lives!”

The harvest did more than provide food.

Neighbors began asking questions. How had the field survived the flooding? Why were the plants healthier? What had they done differently?

Etienne openly shared the agroecological practices he had learned. Conversations about soil and fertilizer became moments of exchange. For Etienne, they were also opportunities to speak about perseverance and trust in God’s provision.

Through one pastor, the network extended into Larama. Knowledge shared at a regional gathering strengthened one family. That family’s example strengthened a community. And a training attended by participants from across 12 countries bore fruit hundreds of kilometers away.

This is how the ECHO network grows in West Africa. Through relationships formed across borders. Through learning carried home. Through fields that become demonstrations.

What begins as connection becomes collaboration. What begins as training becomes testimony.

“ECHO’s training saved our lives!”

Right: Corn harvested in Burkina Faso, where techniques learned through ECHO West Africa are helping fields become places of learning for others.



The Network in Action: *Across Northeast Thailand*

This story began with a visit.

Representatives from a partner network traveled to ECHO Asia in Chiang Mai, Thailand. During their time together, they also met at the office of the Thailand Research Council in Chiang Mai. In those conversations, shared concerns emerged, particularly the need for clean drinking water in vulnerable communities. The connections formed during that visit, facilitated through ECHO Asia, opened the door to something deeper.

Not long after, ECHO Asia was invited to support a two-day training in Khon Kaen Province, organized by Global Harvest Foundation. Approximately 40 participants from local churches across Northeast Thailand, including church leaders and community representatives, gathered to learn about the Biosand Water Filter system, a practical, low-cost technology designed to address the urgent need for safe drinking water.

During the training, ECHO Asia and its partners walked participants through the entire process from start to finish. They prepared biochar, selected and washed gravel and sand, and installed the complete biosand filter system. For many, it was their first hands-on experience with water filtration technology.

The training did not end when participants returned home. Global Harvest Foundation provided seed funding, approximately 5,000 Thai Baht per biosand filter set, enabling churches to implement the system directly in their communities. As installations began and families experienced the benefits of clean water, the impact quickly multiplied.

Reflecting on the initiative, a representative from Global Harvest Foundation shared:

“This system works because it reaches the communities that truly need clean drinking water, and it helps us build good relationships with them.”

Clean water improved daily life, but it also became something more. It became a bridge for relationship-building and service. Churches were able to demonstrate care in tangible ways, building trust and opening doors for deeper engagement in the communities they serve.

The initiative has continued to expand and is now in its third generation of growth. Biosand filter systems have been implemented in approximately 15 provinces across Northeast Thailand. What began as a conversation has become an ongoing movement of practical service and collaboration.

Challenges remain. In some areas, sourcing river sand and gravel can be difficult and costly. Yet communities remain committed because the system meets a real and pressing need.

This collaboration stands as a clear example of how relationships within the ECHO network can lead to practical solutions, strengthened local leadership, and multiplied impact. When partners connect, learn together, and respond to community needs, the network grows stronger, and hope spreads from one place to another.

Photos from a two-day biosand water filter training in Khon Kaen Province, Northeast Thailand, where ECHO Asia was invited to support local partners and churches learning practical water filtration techniques.





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If you are 70½ or older, you can make a meaningful difference through a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) from your IRA. In 2025, you can transfer up to \$108,000 directly to ECHO, supporting smallholder farmers and communities in need, while also satisfying your required minimum distribution, tax-free. To count for the 2025 tax year, gifts must be completed by December 31.

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