

THE AGRO-FORESTRY PROGRAM AT ST. JOSEPH PARISH

Agro-forestry is one of the most important and most successful elements of the OLQP Haiti ministry. Most of Haiti's forested areas have been cut down, creating and exacerbating many of the nation's major problems:

- floods and mudslides
- lower water tables
- loss of animal forage
- poor growing conditions for crops
- contaminated water sources (which contributes to waterborne diseases, including cholera)
- loss of biodiversity
- local climate change

OLQP began agro-forestry efforts in St. Joseph parish in 2010. Since 2014, a cooperative agreement between OLQP and the Smallholder Farmers Alliance (SFA, www.smallholderfarmersalliance.org) has been the basis for the program, which now includes tree planting, agricultural service, livestock, and training programs in eight of the 12 chapel areas of the parish. SFA director Timote George inspires local leaders to carry out the agro-forestry program and links parish communities with outside markets and resources. Haitians identify priorities, manage programs, and complete the work in the community.

The SFA has established eight tree nurseries in parish communities. Local volunteers plant seeds and raise the seedlings through meticulous care and daily watering, carrying the water from a nearby water source. As the seedlings grow, the volunteers transfer them to larger containers. When the plants are ready, community members, including school children, transplant them on the mountainside as part of a work party known as a *kombit*. Since the program's start, an estimated 700,000 trees have been planted. Key to the program's success is the one-on-one and group training provided by SFA agronomists. The training enables the community and individual smallholder farmers to successfully maintain their trees, and teaches them to be problem solvers instead of just beneficiaries.

Additional training is given to several farmers from each nursery area, who become extension agents to help their fellow farmers in the future. Both male and female farmers are equal partners in this training.

Another important element of the agro-forestry program is the mix of plants cultivated. These plants include trees that produce food (oranges, breadfruit, and papaya) for family use and sell, trees for timber and handicrafts, and coffee, which is a cash crop.

The SFA also maintains a bean and pigeon pea “seed bank” to help smallholder farmers begin or improve their crops. Farmers who participate in the tree-growing program receive an agricultural tool (for example, a hoe) and seeds from the seed bank. After harvest, the farmers return their original quantities of seed to the seed bank for others to use. Some farmers in the other four chapel areas receive tools as well, in return for agreeing to participate in nursery and tree planting kombits, for curtailing animals from free-grazing in agricultural areas, and for maintaining trees that have been planted in the communities.

A recent addition to the OLQP-SFA partnership is an animal sharing program. Participants receive a goat or a cow. In return, they pass on their animals’ first offspring to another family. When the recipient of the offspring is able to pass an offspring on to another farmer, the recipient becomes the “owner” of the offspring he/she received. In addition, farmers breed their female goats or cows with the improved animals tended by the local cooperative, improving their own animals.

TRANSFORMING FAMILIES’ LIVES

Francois Pierre lives in the small community of Dodar in St. Joseph parish. His experiences with the SFA programs are a good example of the positive difference they can make for a family. In 2013, he actively participated in the SFA’s training program, learning about agroforestry technology and environmental protection. With assistance from the SFA, he built one of the most productive tree plantations in the area.

In the first planting season of 2016, Mr. Pierre received 24 pounds of black bean seeds, which the SFA helped him plant. He harvested 192 pounds. After returning his initial amount to the seed bank, he sold some of the beans, kept some for his family to eat, and kept some to create his own personal seed bank. The money he made selling beans helped him rehabilitate his house, which was very old and vulnerable to storms. He also used seeds from his own stored seeds for the second 2016 planting, which did not require any additional support from the SFA.

Also in 2016, the SFA gave one goat to Mr. Pierre. By the end of the year, he was able to pass along the first offspring to another farmer while keeping his mother goat. An SFA technician says a healthy male goat can be sold for at least \$120 US.

Mr. Pierre’s situation has changed dramatically since he has participated in the SFA programs. He is more economically self-sufficient, uses more environmentally friendly practices, and is knowledgeable about better agricultural practices. The SFA’s dream is to give many other farmers the same kind of assistance.



Mr. Pierre works in the tree nursery at the chapel area of Dodar.



Farmers prepare a bed to plant tree seeds at the nursery in the La Source chapel area.

Joseph Jacques, a participating farmer, brings trees to plant in his plot in Guerin.

