

Grains for Hope - 1

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

Palm Springs, California. It's the national meeting of the American Association of Cereal Chemists. Among the speakers are two presenters talking about a special project which is shipping micronutrient-enhanced grain products to underprivileged countries. There is something special about these two presenters: In addition to the other things they are working on, they will soon experience their senior prom. Yes, these two presenters at this national meeting are high school students. They are among the student leaders of a remarkable rural project known as Grains for Hope. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Carol Spangler is a teacher at Sabetha High School and advisor to Grains for Hope. Carol grew up near Sabetha at the rural community of Fairview, population 269 people. Now, that's rural.

Carol studied at the College of the Ozarks in Missouri. Eventually, Carol and her husband came back to her home area where she served as a school librarian and French teacher. In 2002, she had the opportunity to participate in an externally-funded summer internship. She chose Wenger Manufacturing.

Wenger Manufacturing in Sabetha is one of the world's leaders in commercial extrusion cooking systems, as we have previously profiled. "I grew up around here," Carol said, "and I always wondered what it was they did in there." That summer she learned about Wenger's role in extrusion, which is a method of processing grain.

That fall, for its accreditation process, Sabetha High School was to do a building-wide problem solving activity. Carol suggested that the problem-solving activity could be to determine what country would best benefit from receiving extruded grain products such as those produced by Wenger. Her idea was selected. The entire school took this on as a project and divided into teams to research various countries and present the results.

Student teams researched various issues such as shipping, infrastructure, rates of malnourishment, and much more. In May 2003, the teams presented their results to a panel of five food science professionals. The panel of experts concluded that the most logical country to receive such foodstuffs would be the country of Mozambique.

What should this project be called? The name "Grains for Hope" was selected, and a student-designed logo was selected through an art contest at the high school. More research followed, with two students traveling to Istanbul. Carol met with the director of the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition in Geneva, Switzerland.

The project came to fruition during the 2005-2006 school year, when Grains for Hope held a bagging night. Students, adults, and members of the community helped fill bags of the extruded, micronutrient-enhanced grain product for shipment to Mozambique. A mission in Mozambique received and distributed the 1,231 pounds of product from Grains for Hope in Kansas.

It went so well that Grains for Hope registered as a 501(c)3 not-for-profit foundation and went on to partner with Wenger Manufacturing and Kansas State University. The project continues to grow.

By the beginning of 2012, Carol Spangler estimates that Grains for Hope has involved some 200 students and shipped 25 tons of these enhanced grain products to Mozambique and Haiti.

This amazing project has not gone unnoticed. Here are some of the awards which this project has brought to Sabetha High School through the years: The Kansas Partners in Education Award, the National Association for Tech Prep Leadership Award, the Civic Star award for the state of Kansas, the Kansas in the World Award for Excellence in International Education, and more. One Grains for Hope member won state and national FFA awards for his work, and for several years, two students have won scholarships to attend the national meeting of the American Association of Cereal Chemists.

Palm Springs, California. Here at the annual meeting of the American Association of Cereal Chemists, two high school students from Sabetha, Kansas have been presenting the remarkable story of Grains for Hope. We commend all those involved with Grains for Hope for making a difference with their passion and compassion.

Ultimately, it is not the various awards which are most important to Carol Spangler and her principal Todd Evans, but rather something else. We'll learn about that next week.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.