

Grains for Hope - 2

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

What crop are you producing? Many Kansas farmers produce wheat, corn, and soybeans which can be processed into various products. Now, extruded grain products are traveling from rural Kansas to needy families around the world, thanks to an innovative Kansas school system, a pioneering private sector grain processing company, and a creative teacher with some caring students. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Last week we learned about Sabetha High School teacher Carol Spangler and Grains for Hope, a Sabetha student organization which helps ship extruded grain products to needy families in Mozambique and Haiti. After Carol learned about Wenger Manufacturing, a world-leader in grain extrusion technology based in Sabetha, she suggested a school research project to determine which countries could best use the extruded grain products generated by Wenger. That became the organization known as Grains for Hope which has led the effort to ship these products overseas.

Grains for Hope has involved an estimated 200 students and shipped 25 tons of enhanced grain products overseas. This innovative project benefitted many poor, malnourished families in these developing countries and has led to Sabetha High School receiving numerous awards.

But in visiting with Carol Spangler and Sabetha High principal Todd Evans, it's clear the awards are not what is most important to them.

"It's amazing what kids can accomplish if you open the doors," Carol said. She proudly points to the achievements of those students who have been involved with Grains for Hope.

"In education today, project-based education is one of the major directions," said principal Todd Evans. In addition to the community engagement in Sabetha and the humanitarian benefits for needy families overseas, he sees the beneficial learning outcomes which result from students applying their classroom studies in a real world setting.

"A project like this gives relevance and meaning to their studies," Todd said. "All of a sudden, students see that physics make sense, or it dawns on them that trigonometry can be used on an actual project."

So what have students learned? Ben Koch is a senior at Sabetha High. "Incorporating this has been very meaningful," he said. "You get to see a more global picture and you get encouraged to find a rewarding career, not just a job." He received a scholarship to attend and speak to the American Association of Cereal Chemists annual meeting, and Carol Spangler saw his confidence and professionalism grow through that experience.

Another student gained a career-building internship through Grains for Hope. He came from the nearby rural community of Morrill, population 270 people. Now, that's rural.

Anna Sunderland is a sophomore at Sabetha. After an earthquake in Haiti, she traveled there through her church and worked in a Haitian hospital. The experience helped her see the importance of these food products and realize how fortunate people are in the U.S.

“I remember that we had a baby who needed medicine,” Anna said. “I put Tylenol in the baby’s mouth with a plastic disposable cup like those which come with the bottle in the U.S. I was going to throw it away, but a lady from the clinic stopped me because she needed to clean the cup and save it. She said, ‘We have only one cup for the entire clinic.’” Wow.

Compassion for those less fortunate has been a driving force for the Grains for Hope project. It has also been a life-changing experience for a number of students.

Carol Spangler points to Grains for Hope students who have gone on to study at Ivy League schools. The young woman who was the founding President of Grains for Hope did cholera research at Dartmouth and is now doing graduate studies at the University of North Carolina on infectious diseases and malnutrition.

What crop are you producing? Grains for Hope is helping process those crops into products for needy families, but it is also producing something else. We commend Carol Spangler, Todd Evans, and all those involved for making a difference in the lives of those served, as well as those who are doing the serving. For Sabetha High students, Grains for Hope is producing an abundant harvest of caring and achievement.

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