

The Minden Rotary Club and their partners are ready to move forward with a Global Grant project that will benefit farmers in Nigeria. The project will deliver hand corn planters to farmers to increase health and economic development in the community.

Bill Raun and his fellow agricultural scientists at Oklahoma State University developed a hand corn planter that uses a mechanism attached to the bottom of a PVC pipe that the farmer fills with seed. The planter penetrates the ground which pushes the mechanism releasing one seed at the proper soil depth. The simple machine can ensure more uniform crops, increase yields, improve efficiency, reduce seed waste, and benefit farmers' health.

"The corn planter was developed at Oklahoma State and they've been trying to get it out into the world. Rotary is one avenue where we're trying to help accomplish that," Kevin Raun said. "The patents are open and the plans to build them are out there for the public to take advantage of."

A Vocational Training Team led by Minden Rotary Club member and farmer Kevin Raun will travel to Abuja, Nigeria for the planting season in March. The team consists of three graduate students from Oklahoma State University, one who is from Nigeria.

"A big part of this success is having a local Nigerian on the team. We're going to be working with the Rotary Club in Abuja and also Caritas Internationalis, a religious affiliated relief organization. The Nigerian student who's going with us has worked with them before," Raun said.

Caritas has identified 50 farmers outside Abuja to participate in the initial training. In addition to teaching farmers how to properly use the planter, the team will be working in the city to establish manufacturing and maintenance of the tool.

"Part of this project is developing a manufacturer to build them locally. OSU is sending 25 planters there ahead of time so we have the starting position. The hope is to get them built locally to develop some business. That fits Rotary's paradigm by giving them the tools to carry on and sustain," Raun explained.

The training team will spend a few weeks in Nigeria training farmers in the use of the planter and Caritas will complete follow up work taking measurements through two planting seasons to determine the effectiveness of the project.

"In 2010 their average corn yield was 22 bushels to the acre. We're hoping to add 20-25 bushels of corn to the acre," Raun said. "Caritas is going to track this through two planting seasons and take measurements to see that the goals are being met or not being met."

Initial efforts to supply the planters to farmers in need started in 2018. The Minden Rotary Club and their district partners pitched the idea to send the planters to Uganda to the Rotary Foundation. Paperwork for the initial project was unable to be completed leaving Rotary to look at other locations for their project.

"Originally we were lined up to go to Uganda. That deal fell through so we looked at going to El Salvador and that didn't pan out. My cousin, Bill Raun, is an agronomy professor at Oklahoma State. He had a graduate student from Nigeria so we went that direction and now we're working with a club in Abuja, Nigeria," Raun said.

The project was approved for Global Grant funds from the Rotary International Foundation just before Christmas. Although slightly changed from the original proposal, the initial work to get the hand planter to farmers that could benefit from its use has been helpful in making the proposal a reality.

"It feels like we've been running this race for a long time, but the work we did for Uganda really helped expedite this second location option so it wasn't all for naught," Raun said.

As details of the project are worked out, the estimated cost has risen from the proposal two years ago. The project is now estimated to cost \$59,000 including the initial planters and cost to train farmers and manufacturers in Nigeria.

A small portion of the total project cost will come directly from Minden Rotary and their fundraising efforts. Other Rotary clubs in the district and Oklahoma have contributed funds as well. The bulk of funding will be supplied through the Global Grants Rotary Foundation program which invests contributions before redistributing the assets back to clubs, districts, and global projects.

"We're able to parlay a small contribution into a larger contribution. Our club is putting in about \$2,500 but we put into that global fund every year so we're getting a return back on that investment," Raun said. "The way they fund the Rotary International Foundation is substantial and it's great to see what's possible to do in the world. It makes you feel like you're part of a bigger, better operation."

Community support of the project has been positive from the beginning. Minden Rotary has received several contributions for the project and continues to accept donations.

"I want to thank the people in Minden who have supported the project over the last two years. We're grateful for the help we've received locally and if somebody still wants to help with this project we can sure do it," Raun said.

After two years of planning and coordinating with individuals on three different continents, Minden Rotary will soon make a lasting impact on the lives of Nigerian farmers and the people they feed.