



A Different Kind of MISSION FIELD

Covenanters in Minnesota, North Dakota, and Washington State team up with Covenant World Relief to help fight world hunger.

When Mark Tungseth went on a mission trip this past summer, he didn't board a plane and head overseas. He just hopped on his tractor and headed out to his farm.

Tungseth, a member of Teien Covenant Church in Drayton, North Dakota, is part of a group of Covenant farmers involved in a growing project for the Foods Resource Bank (FRB), a Christian group that works on long-term solutions to world hunger. His "mission field"—as his family has nicknamed it—is a plot of soybeans, part of 100 acres planted for FRB by farmers from the Teien church and Covenant churches in Warren and Kennedy, Minnesota. A second project in-

volves farmers from Covenant churches in Willmar, New London, and Pennock, Minnesota.

The idea is simple but ingenious. Farmers like Tungseth donate the use of their land. FRB—a group of fourteen church agencies and nonprofits, including Covenant World Relief—helps them find a partner church, which donates the cost of putting in the crop. In the project that Tungseth is involved in, Roseville Covenant Church (which is outside of St. Paul, 360 miles southeast of Drayton) pledged about \$6,000, or one-third of its annual Covenant World Relief offering, to the project. The farmers then ask local agri-businesses to donate products like seed and fertilizer. When

the crop is harvested, FRB sells it and then distributes the profits to a relief agency like Covenant World Relief.

The result is what FRB calls "twinning" or doubling the initial \$6,000 donated by Roseville Covenant. Those funds can often be matched by a grant to Covenant World Relief from USAID (the U.S. Agency for International Development), arranged through FRB. In this case, the Covenant World Relief funds will be used to buy equipment for farmers in Moldova, a former Soviet Republic wedged between Ukraine and Romania. Moldova, a country of about 4.5 million people, is one of the poorest countries in Europe.

Some of the funds from the Willmar, Pennock, and New London proj-

ect will fund a \$12,500 Covenant World Relief project to help Fulani families in the Central African Republic start gardens. Covenant missionary Roy Danforth is helping coordinate the project, which will supply fruit trees and seeds for each garden.

FRB lets Tungseth and the others use their farming skills—“what we do best,” he says—to help farmers in poor countries care for their families. “This project has given us the opportunity to respond in a tangible and measured way to the love and blessings that God has given us,” Tungseth says.

Along the way, Tungseth and other organizers have experienced a series of “divine appointments that have helped us sense that God is moving in this direction,” he says. “And all we have to do is get on his train.”

In the past, Tungseth and the others have donated a part of their profits to Covenant World Relief. “Instead of just writing a check for a few dollars,” he says, “we have now become part of

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the project. There is a much greater ownership.”

Ron DeWeerd of FRB hopes to change the crisis-driven responses that many churches take to hunger. “It’s like a one shot-deal,” he says. “We [in the U.S.] collect money, send it somewhere, and we’ve done our good deed for the day.”

“We aren’t going to solve world hunger by sending a box of food somewhere,” DeWeerd says. “We need long-term solutions—the idea of growing crops is perfect because it’s something we do every year.”

DeWeerd’s first contact with the Covenant Church came in 1997, when he was working in disaster relief after

floods ravaged homes in Grand Forks, North Dakota. There he became friends with Paul Knight, pastor of Hope Covenant Church. “He and I hit it off and we made a deal,” DeWeerd says. “I fixed up a big commercial kitchen in his church, and he let me feed my volunteers there during the week.”

After the rebuilding project was completed, DeWeerd began working with FRB, and Knight introduced him to Jim Sundholm, director of Covenant World Relief, paving the way for the Covenant to eventually join the organization. FRB, which started in 1991 with 400 acres on ten farms, this year had 4,100 acres of land in ninety-five communities.

All the money raised in the growing project goes directly to agencies like Covenant World Relief. FRB charges no overhead, which it covers through grants and other fundraising. ➤

Bob Smietana is features editor of the *Companion*.



(above and facing) Mark Tungseth’s “mission field” of soybeans

Jeff Hoverson, pastor of Teien Covenant Church, a congregation of about fifty people, says he's been amazed to see how members of his church have taken on the FRB project. His job has been to "sit in a chair and watch it run," he says.

"You might think that because these farmers are hurting economically, they would not be interested," Hoverson says. In fact, when DeWeerd approached him, Hoverson was skeptical. DeWeerd was visiting his office when several farmers for the church happened to stop in. They and DeWeerd started talking, and the project took off from there.

The idea of helping farmers in Moldova came from Mark Tungseth's



Ron DeWeerd of FRB

brother Keith, who works in church relations for Covenant World Mission. He and several Covenant churches in Tacoma, Washington, have been involved in ministry to Moldova, and as people at Teien Covenant heard about conditions there, they decided Moldova was a natural fit for the project.

Roseville Covenant Church got involved through a connection to Brian Schanil, pastor at Warren Covenant Church. Schanil had formerly served at Roseville, and knew of the church's involvement with Covenant World Relief. Rick Carlson, pastor of Roseville Covenant, says that FRB's close ties to Covenant World Relief made the proj-



The proceeds from the sale of these soybeans will aid farmers in Moldova through Covenant World Relief.

ect appealing. "We would not have gotten involved except for World Relief," he says. "We want to be sure that the money we give goes to the right place," he says, "and World Relief has an excellent track record of getting funds to the right place."

Carlson and Mark Tungseth both express great appreciation for their partners in the project.

"The real heroes in this project are the farmers," Carlson says. "They donate the use of the land and their expertise, and they run the most risk."

Mark Tungseth is looking forward to meeting with people from the Roseville and Tacoma churches in the future. "We certainly feel part of a team but we have not put faces to our teammates yet," he says. "They are the churches that are making this possible. Without the vision, passion, financial contributions, and administration [the project] would be much smaller or not happen at all. I am thankful for them."

Meanwhile, Jeff Hoverson hopes that the "mission fields" of soybeans will lead to a more conventional mission trip for members of his congregation. "One of the goals we have is to have a few of adults go over to Moldova to see what is happening there.

"It's nice to have a specific place that we selected rather than just giving the money to Covenant World Relief—it kind of put a face on the deal." □

Working Together to Fight Hunger

Foods Resource Bank (FRB) is a unique partnership of churches and church agencies, working together across denominational lines to help provide long term solutions to global hunger. It's modeled after Canadian Foodgrains Bank, a Christian agency run by Canadian churches that is one of the largest food aid providers in the world.

FRB members include:

Covenant World Relief
 Adventist Development and Relief Agency
 Catholic Relief Services
 Christian Reformed World Relief Committee
 Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
 Church World Service
 Lutheran World Relief
 Mennonite Central Committee of the US
 Nazarene Compassionate Ministries, Inc.
 Outreach International
 Presbyterian Church (U.S.A)
 Reformed Church World Service
 United Church of Christ/Wider Church Ministries
 United Methodist Committee on Relief
 World Hope International

With additional supporting members:

Bread for the World
 Seed Programs Inc.
 Carol & Vernon Sloan, Sloan Farms
 STOP Hunger Now □