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Moving Forward

An old saying goes, “Give a man a fish, he eats for a day; teach a man to fish, he eats for a life time.” Having enough food is not a given for all people in this world and that is sometimes forgotten by those for whom it is a given. Countries around the world have many families that wonder every morning whether there will be any food to eat that night. Fathers, mothers, and many young children work all day hoping to earn enough money to put something on the table that night. The difference between poor and rich has been a problem for as long as man has existed, but it has grown worse as the price of crops has risen over the past few years. Families find it harder as prices continue to rise to provide the money to supply food. Some families have even had to choose between health care and food, creating even more problems and building a foundation for a cycle that is hard to escape. Millions have died of starvation or illness due to poor quality of food. As the world’s population and demand for food continues to increase, the space to grow crops decreases. Therefore, it is increasingly difficult to get food to all those in need. As technology advances and better farming methods are discovered it seems like there could be a cure for the rising food prices. The successful “fishermen,” countries or areas who have enough food, must teach struggling countries how to sustain a growing population. According to the World Bank, there are six billion people on Earth, but only one billion live in developed countries. The other five billion live in developing countries where families can barely survive on what is earned and produced. One concept that grew out of World War II is that countries are like dominoes and if one is being affected by something, it will eventually hit many if not all other countries (“Development”). Agricultural Extension Programs are a way to teach countries how to reach a higher level of productivity in farming. The Agricultural Extension Programs could extend farming to a higher stage of development and ultimately lower the food shortage. An Agricultural Extension Program should be developed for Eastern Europe, one area of the world whose citizens need assistance.

Eastern Europe is not as much a geographic area as it is a group of countries that have similar cultures, religions, economies and histories. The term Eastern Europe began during the Cold War and has continued. The United Nations recognizes ten countries within Eastern Europe: Belarus, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, and Ukraine (“Eastern, Europe”). Other world organizations also include the following countries as part of Eastern Europe: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia/Herzegovina, Croatia, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Serbia/Montenegro, Slovenia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The CIA World Fact Book identifies Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Kyrgyzstan as countries that have the largest percentage of labor force in agriculture. These four countries in particular would be important to be included in an Agricultural Extension Program since a large number of people in the area receive not only all of their food, but also their well-being from farming within the countries.

Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Kyrgyzstan represent many other countries and show that though all countries in Eastern Europe are similar, each country is unique. Albania is in southeastern Europe. It borders the Adriatic Sea and Ionian Sea and lies between Greece and Montenegro and Kosovo. Armenia is in southwestern Europe, east of Turkey. Azerbaijan is in southwestern Asia. It borders the Caspian Sea and lies between Iran and Russia, with a small European portion north of the Caucasus range. Kyrgyzstan is in central

Asia, west of China (CIA-The World Fact Book). The CIA World Fact Book divides up the land in all countries into three basic types, arable land, permanent crops, and other. Arable land includes land that is cultivated for crops that are replanted after each harvest. Land classified under Permanent crops means that the land is cultivated for crops that do not have to be replanted. It also includes land under flowering shrubs, fruit trees, nut trees, and vines, but not trees used for lumber. Meadows, pastures, forests, woodlands, buildings, and roads are classified under the other category. In Albania the land is divided up to about 20.1% arable land, 4.21% permanent crops, and 75.69% is other. In Armenia the land is divided up to about 16.78% arable land, 2.01% permanent crops, and 81.21% of the land is other. In Azerbaijan the land is divided up to about 20.62% arable land, 2.61% permanent crops, and 76.77% of the land is other. In Kyrgyzstan the land is divided up to about 6.55% arable land, 1.28% permanent crops, and 93.17% of the land is other (CIA- The World Fact Book).

Albania's economy continues to grow but it is still one of the poorest countries in Europe. Albania is also struggling against deforestation, soil erosion, and water pollution from industrial and domestic effluents. Armenia has been taken under control by many different groups, many different times and therefore has an unsteady economy. It also struggles with soil pollution from toxic chemicals such as DDT. The forests and water supply were also depleted by the energy crisis of the 1990s. The soil in Azerbaijan and around it is in bad shape due to oil spills, the use of DDT pesticides, and from toxic defoliants used in the production of cotton. Kyrgyzstan is on its way to being a much stronger country but is still working on it. Water pollution is its major barrier to improvement. Water pollution is the cause of water-borne diseases and soil salinity from faulty irrigation practices (CIA-The World Fact Book).

Albania's main crops are wheat, corn, potatoes, vegetables, fruits, sugar beets, and grapes. Albania also has many meat farms and produces various dairy products. Approximately 58% of Albania's labor force, which is about 1.09 million total people, work in agriculture. The average family size in Albania is 2.02 children and the literacy rate is 98.7% (CIA-The World Fact Book). Armenia's crops are fruit, especially grapes, and vegetables. Livestock is also a major part of the agriculture. In Armenia about 46.2% of the labor force, about 1.2 million total people, works in agriculture. Armenia's average family size is 1.35 children and the literacy rate is over 99%. Azerbaijan's crops are cotton, grain, rice, grapes, fruit, vegetables, tea, and tobacco. There are also cattle, pig, sheep, and goat farms. About 41% of the labor force, about 5.243 million total people, works in agriculture. The average family size in Azerbaijan is 2.05 children and the literacy rate is over 98%. Kyrgyzstan crops are tobacco, cotton, potatoes, vegetables, grapes, fruits and berries. Also there are sheep, goat, and cattle farms. About 55% of the labor force, 2.7 million total people, works in agriculture. The average family size is 2.67 children and the literacy rate is over 98% in Kyrgyzstan (CIA-The World Fact Book).

In general, countries in Eastern Europe have the same struggles preventing development in Agriculture. One of the bigger issues is that pollution is high and has damaged not only the land but the water in most of these countries. Since these countries encompass small land areas, having land that is unusable due to pollution creates a real need to enhance productivity. Most people in Eastern Europe have a decent education. The literacy rates for all the countries are high and family sizes are smaller (CIA-The World Fact Book). The better education system helps set up for a solid Agricultural Extension Program because it creates a willingness to learn. All of the countries are struggling with rising prices on food, especially in the past few months as food prices around the world have increased by about 75% ("Development"). Some families now spend over half of their daily income on food, leaving almost nothing for healthcare and other necessities. People are also facing rising gas prices making it harder to

transport crops to places where they can be sold. According to an article from The World Bank, Eastern Europe and Central Asia has actually seen an increase in productivity and a decrease in poverty rates in recent years. This is not a stable increase though because a drought this past year alone hurt prices on food greatly and caused poverty rates to go back up (Kircher 1).

The history of farming in Eastern Europe provides insights into its issues and struggles today. The countries have been controlled by various groups that conducted society in different ways. Before the current government the communist society controlled all the farmers and their produce. Therefore, there was no competition and the farmers were all being told to do the same thing. Today, there are many subsistence farmers who comprise the agricultural business. Since these farmers have the freedom to do what they believe is best, techniques differ and competition returns. However, farmers there don't know how to get the most from their land. Agricultural Extension Programs could enhance their education and farming productivity.

Extension Programs are actually not a new thing to Eastern Europe (Rolls 11). There is a free program that uses group teaching for farmers with similar needs to share ideas and learn together (Rolls 12). Farms are now mostly privately owned and although the owner of the farm land is not always the one cultivating it, it is still a step away from collective farming. The Food and Agriculture Group of the United Nations realizes that farmers need to learn how to run their farms with enough efficiency that the farms can be their sole source of income. Or, alternatively farmers need to learn to be able to produce enough from the farm to feed their family and still have time to work another job to support their families' additional needs (Rolls 13). Currently that is where families fall short. They can not produce enough from their farms to support the whole family and they can't keep the farm going if they chose to work another job.

The Food and Agriculture Group of the United Nations has also determined who they are trying to teach, knowing that it makes a difference in how they should be taught. In Eastern Europe the common farmer is a 47 year old male with a small work force (Rolls 19). Their study also found that even those who had farming experience, needed to be taught because they are now farming at a different level than they did before. Furthermore, in addition to learning how to farm the land, they need to learn where, when, and how to sell any surplus they may have (Rolls 20). Farmers also need education to emphasize the need to manage the farm, not only for the short-term, but for the long-term (Rolls 21). Programs need to look at not just what the country needs as a whole but what each individual farmer's needs are and what can be done to make each farm, no matter how big or small, the most effective for its owner.

The current extension program set up by the Food and Agriculture Group of the United Nations, has specialists in farm accounting, farm economics, farm management and tax accounts. All of these specialists are located at national and regional centers and in higher education institutions (Rolls 22). However, the existing program is not perfect. In the competitive job market, good specialists move through quickly so none really get to personally know the land and the farmers. Also, it is hard to know if the right people are getting the help. There is a margin of difference between who should get help and how many actually are (Rolls 22). The demand is high for resources and the supply is running low.

The most common and effective way of teaching is one-on-one. The drawback of this method is that more people are needed to teach. The current extension groups are struggling to get enough teachers in the first place and then they can't hold onto those they get because they

can not offer competitive pay. In addition, long-term focus is hard to maintain as the farmers are more worried about their day-to-day operations instead of preparing for progress in the future (Rolls 23). While the instructors are trying to show farmers management methods, the farmers want to learn more of the technological aspect of the farms. The farmers fail to recognize that if they do not monitor their finances and farm operations, there will not be enough money to support the technology they desire. The Food and Agriculture Group of the United Nations is worried that too many groups are working separately to try to teach the farmers and feel that this is not the best way to grow (Rolls 24).

In the United States alone, there are many universities and other organizations working constantly to improve farming methods and technology. If the information gathered by these groups is shared and spread to other countries such as those in Eastern Europe, farmers could learn how to improve the quality of their land. If the quality of the land is increased, then productivity is increased. If productivity is increased, then farmers can produce enough food to feed their families regularly and in healthy amounts and eventually work up a surplus to earn extra money. With additional money, countries can work towards becoming more independent and can slowly become fully developed.

The question remaining is who is to set up, run and coordinate the Agricultural Extension Programs. One group must organize all of the efforts going over to help there could be an improvement to the efforts. Many foundations already have funds going to countries in need of assistance, but the better idea may be to redirect the funds or label them differently. Instead of just sending funds over, the money should be used to send volunteers who can teach farmers how to better run their farms. Instead of sending supplies over to feed the people, send technology to help the farmers be more efficient. By teaching the farmers, we are teaching whole countries to become more independent. The United Nations provides information about what needs to be done to help adapt to the climate changes and rising prices on gas and food. Now, organizations need to act on plans and follow through. In places like Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Kyrgyzstan, extra effort needs to be given since farming comprises the majority of the population's livelihood. Returning to the old saying of "Give a man a fish, he eats for a day; teach a man to fish, he eats for a lifetime," a great truth is seen in the words. As the countries in Eastern Europe try to develop a state of independence after being under control for so many years, they must be taught how to make the most out of their land. Since the land is not in the best shape for growing, farmers need new technologies and ideas to help them revive the land, their families, and the countries' economies. Pollution has ruined many resources in the soil and caused the water in some areas to only be a carrier for disease. There is a lot of work to be done to bring the land up to its full potential and keep it there, but it is possible. By working together and sharing knowledge the world can help bring an end to the worry of families in Eastern Europe and other places. The worry of if there will be food on the table that night or if there is, if it is enough to do any good. The people of Eastern Europe have the intelligence to build strong countries; they just need a push in the right direction. The assistance of specialists will not only help with the actual cultivation of the land but also with the accounting and managing of the farm. That is why an Agricultural Extension Program should be developed for Eastern Europe, one major area of the world that needs help to "eat for a lifetime."

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