

St. Paul Pioneer Press (MN)

November 13, 2009

Section: Editorial

Edition: St. Paul

Page: B8

ON THRESHERS, LOCAL FOOD, FAITH, REASON AND MORE ... THE HARDY TINKERERS OF THE MIDWAY

A workshop in St. Paul's Midway area is home to some serious retro tinkering. The shop in the office of **Compatible Technology International** is a museum of hand-cranked, bicycle-powered agricultural devices -- threshers and grinders and a model of a crop storage building that needs no electric power.

Roger Salway, executive director, and Bert Rivers, vice president of operations, told us these are the types of devices the small operation ships to hungry places in Africa, Asia and the Americas. CTI's focus is on assisting local farmers "post harvest" so that crops can be processed or stored and the communities can receive the maximum nutritional benefit.

Salway once traveled the globe for John Deere. Now he and other former agricultural experts and engineers try to design and ship simple devices that can be used in places without electricity or fuel. A hand-cranked device for threshing pearl millet -- a popular cereal grain in hot, dry areas of Africa and India -- is awaiting field tests in Mali. In Haiti and India, CTI is attacking malnutrition by using grinders to develop shelf-stable, high-protein foods, including packets of peanut butter. In Ghana, the group has developed a grinder to turn the super-nutritious leaves of the Moringa tree into a shelf-stable powder.

This small, non-profit organization was founded in 1981 by a group of missionaries, engineers and General Mills food scientists. Funded mostly by contributions, the group tries to find simple improvements to stretch limited food resources. The threshers have no power cords because most of the areas where they will be used have no power. Hooking up a bicycle or an exercise bike to a grinder can increase revolutions and save work.

These hardy tinkerers of the Midway believe there is a solution in the back shop that can alleviate suffering.

We wish them well and encourage readers to learn more at the web site at www.compatibletechnology.org.