



Teach a Man to Fish?

Feed My Starving Children (FMSC) is unique. Many of us say this every day, telling our volunteers about our formula, our partners, our volunteers and our Christian faith. Yes, we are unique at FMSC, and we're also very specific. We have a highly nutritious meal, packed at our sites by volunteers and sent around the world to save lives. That is, basically, what we do. We don't build schools or hospitals. We don't plant churches. We don't promote enhanced agricultural techniques or create clean water systems for remote villages. Some of our partners do these things, but we as an organization do not. And it is this un-diversified portfolio that (in part) makes us the best in the world at what we do. We respond to James' description of pure and faultless religion (James 1:27) by sending food to orphans and widows, and we do it with excellence. Thank God for that.

Sometimes, though, because we do one thing we find ourselves pressed by a potential donor who wants to know what we are doing to "preach the gospel." Or maybe more often, a volunteer raises the question of sustainability. I had a volunteer ask me in front of the crowd, are we causing more problems here by giving a man a fish rather than teaching him to fish? We've all heard the proverb. Some of us have been caught off guard by the antagonistic University class or the volunteer who wants to put us on the spot with this sort of question. Others of us have good answers at the ready: we tell them of Swaziland where the (official) HIV rate is 40%, where a generation of adults has largely been wiped out, and where there are hungry children who need food. We remind them of the Tsunami that orphaned children throughout the Pacific Ocean. We remind them of the Earthquakes in Pakistan and Haiti, of flooding in the Philippines and India, and we tell them we don't expect those kids to be able to learn how to fish on an empty stomach. That is the raw truth of what we do. We send food to the kids in this world who would die without it.

For some, the question remains: What then? And so we move on to tell about our partners who *are* building schools, who *are* planting churches, who are living and working among people who live in dumps in Nicaragua and developing businesses by recycling trash. *Have you seen our jewelry?* We send them food. They do the next step.

That's a pretty good response. But to be honest, my knowledge of our partners pretty much ends there. And while the above description of what we do might satisfy some, I'm not quite satisfied myself. Who are these "partners" we speak of who are distributing our food. What are they like? Who are they serving? And yes, what are their *next steps*? It is my hope that this section of our newsletter will serve to better educate us on our partners, tell you about the women harvesting the coffee we sell, or maybe occasionally

give a deeper look into our ingredients. We've got wonderful partners. It's time we learned more of their stories.

One of these incredible partners of ours is Compatible Technology International (CTI). In India, huge potato harvests rot every year because of the heat and humidity. CTI developed storage facilities and set them above pools of water, keeping the potatoes cool, and these Indian farmers were able to sell potatoes at the market 4 months longer than anyone else (As if that wasn't enough, they've also developed large scale peelers, slicers, dryers and grinders, so that families could locally sell potato snacks). In Nicaragua, you can find their systems CTI has developed to provide clean water.

Through its friendship with FMSC, CTI has connected with several of our partners in Haiti and elsewhere, providing grinders which are helping Haitians process a variety of products, from corn to cocoa to a peanut butter based nutritional food that serves, like our meal, to fight against malnourishment. Look for one of these grinders in our educational area soon, and use it to share with our volunteers the work our partners are doing.

In the end, we at Feed My Starving Children are giving people fish, because without the fish they would die. Ours is a vital mission. But it doesn't stop there. Thankfully we have partners who believe in teaching people to fish, to study, to farm, to sell. And there are a few, like CTI, who go even further by saying, "Teach a man to make a hook and his micro enterprise can help raise the standard of living for his whole community." Clearly, we can't do it alone. We need each other. I am thankful to be part of an organization that believes this. I'm excited to discover more about our current partners, and to be able to share with our volunteers, not only what we are doing to save lives, but what our partners are doing to strengthen communities around the world.

CTI is based in St. Paul, so get to know them. If you have a chance to schedule an appointment and tour their facilities, do so.