

A project that helps people in developing countries learn about and grow the best local foods to match their nutritional needs.



*A Project of the Rotary Club of Devonport North
District 9830 & Food Plants International*

Learn♦Grow: Surmounting the Challenge of Global Malnutrition and Food Security

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The problem

As global population approaches 7 billion, the number of people in developing countries going to bed hungry every day is approaching 1 billion and increasing. Western food-aid programs are failing to address this problem, yet the paradigms that help perpetuate this failure continue to be re-iterated. In acute food shortages, direct aid is essential, however, sustainable food security must involve self-help. Western food aid programs focus on Western food crops that are often do not grow well as they are not adapted or well suited to target countries. They require high-cost inputs, that people earning less than \$2 per day cannot afford, and which inadequate supply logistics render unavailable. They often cannot be produced sustainably, and more often than not, lack the essential nutrients to prevent malnutrition in the countries with the greatest need.

The Solution - Food Plants International Database

Tasmanian agricultural scientist, Bruce French, conceived a solution to address this problem by unlocking the resources available in local food plants. Whether they are native or introduced, by their very occurrence, local plants demonstrate their adaption to the prevailing environment and pest and disease pressures. Those that are well adapted thrive naturally, without the need for costly inputs such as seed, fertilizers and chemicals. Many such plants are edible, and if those with the highest levels of nutrients missing from the diet can be identified and cultivated, then significant potential exists to sustainably address malnutrition in developing nations. The only element missing from making this possibility a reality is the lack of information on the relevant food plants. Recognising this need, Bruce French set out on a personal quest nearly 40 years ago to rectify this situation by creating the largest database of edible plants that has ever been developed. This database currently contains information on more than 23,000 plants from all countries of world, including names, description, occurrence, production information, edible parts, pictures and references. Most importantly, information on the food value is now included. What was a simple and good idea is therefore now a tangible possibility.

Learn♦Grow

The Learn♦Grow project was developed by the Rotary Club of Devonport North and Rotary District 9830 to help create awareness of this solution and encourage its application. Rotary continues to engage in aid programs in developing countries and one objective is to ensure a Learn♦Grow approach is incorporated into these projects. The many government organisations and NGOs from developed nations that provide food aid should not only be aware of the existence of this solution and its potential, but encourage or prescribe its incorporation into existing and new programs. This concept has real potential and is becoming widely recognised by those who possess the technical knowledge to understand its significance. If it fails to achieve recognition by major aid providers, the current ineffective paradigms will only be perpetuated. It is therefore vital that all organisations facilitating or delivering food aid consider the technical merit and significance of the resource that has been created.

International Rotary District Learn♦Grow Groups

The board of Rotary International has officially recognized the Food Plant Solutions Rotarian Action Groups which will promote the establishment of new Learn♦Grow groups in Rotary districts throughout the world to extend this message to those in need. Programs are currently underway or being developed in Solomon Islands, Timor Leste, Papua New Guinea, Sierra Leone, Haiti, Honduras and Nigeria.

A solution for all aid providers

While the Learn Grow solution has emerged from with Rotary, the solution is available for all aid providers in all countries. While ample data already exists to put this solution into action immediately, ongoing development of the database is underway to enhance its application and enable it to be more readily applied to any country of region in the world where a need exists.

Further information is available on the website www.learngrow.org or by contacting Buz Green, Chairman, Rotary District 9830 Learn♦Grow Project, buzgreen@bigpond.net.au