

GROW AHEAD

CROWDFUNDING CLIMATE RESILIENCE

Industrial agriculture and food production is a major contributor to climate change, and the small-scale farmers whose regenerative practices our future relies on are bearing the brunt of the impacts. In recent years, these farmers have experienced increasing pest pressure, decreasing yields and a quickly-changing landscape — all of which are threatening their livelihoods. Considering that small-scale farmers feed the majority of the developing world, the implications are serious. Agroecological strategies for combating climate change and feeding hungry communities, such as using cover-crops and compost to boost soil organic matter and fertility, must be a global priority, scaling up and out in coming years.

Despite the serious threat that climate change poses to humanity in general, and to small-scale farmers in particular, proven solutions like small-scale regenerative agriculture receive little government or market support and safeguards. Supporting and developing small-scale regenerative farming, however, will require significant resources, research and funding.

Experience has shown that farmers around the world learn best from their peers. Emerging from Central America in the 1970s, the “Farmer-to-Farmer” movement has fueled the training of thousands of peasant farmers by facilitating the exchange of practical experiences and best practices.

This movement is based upon community empowerment, traditional knowledge, and local innovation and cooperation.

In 2015, Fair World Project (FWP) collaborated with the Latin American and Caribbean Network of Fair Trade Small Producers (CLAC) in a contest soliciting small-scale farmer groups to share their experiences and best practices in confronting climate change in their communities. Experience has shown that small-scale farmers are the most cost-effective vehicle for scaling out agroecological practices. Small-scale farmer organizations have the potential to quickly and effectively implement cost-effective climate-resilient tactics, while simultaneously multiplying their experience and organizational impact.

Farmer submissions demonstrated impressive steps taken by these organizations to adjust to the growing challenge of climate change, by diversifying farms, promoting on-farm innovation, and improving soil fertility, among other practices.

To read more about this project, see the official CLAC report, “Climate Change: Voices of Small Producers,” at: tinyurl.com/CLACReport.

Building on this success, FWP will be incorporating “Grow Ahead” into its programming. Grow Ahead is the first online consumer finance platform that allows individuals and organizations to donate or extend loans directly to smallholder farmer organizations around the world in order to support farmer resiliency.

For the first time, individual consumers can forge an intimate link with front-

line farmer organizations, directly funding farmer initiatives and supporting the global effort to address climate change on the farm.

Small-scale farmer organizations in the developing world are historically under-resourced, with limited access to the capital needed to grow their organizations beyond their day-to-day needs. Grow Ahead intends to bridge the resource and funding gap, acting as a launch pad for larger, regional agroecological development campaigns that go beyond individual commodities and focus on whole farm systems.

Moving forward, Grow Ahead and FWP will focus on:

- Facilitating a revolving loan program for farmer-developed resiliency projects, such as soil conservation and yield-boosting compost operations.
- Raising funds for annual regional Farmer-to-Farmer exchanges. These exchanges will facilitate farm leaders’ ability to share successes and resources. They will also produce written and multimedia resources, encapsulating farmer experiences and “takeaways” to share with other farmers.
- Providing funds and resources for farm leader “multiplier” agroecology scholarships. Grow Ahead will raise funds earmarked specifically to provide scholarships for farm leaders and trainers to attend farmer-centric agroecology schools.

TO LEARN MORE, & TO LOAN OR DONATE FUNDS, GO TO: www.GrowAhead.org.

