

# Farmers of the Future – Building the Curriculum

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Check out [Eliminate Poverty Now's](#) work with the [International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics \(ICRISAT\)](#) and [Pencils for Kids](#) to develop [Farmers of the Future](#), a project that is using the classroom and small demonstration gardens to teach children in West Africa about farming techniques that will improve diets and livelihoods. Below is a [post](#) written by [Eliminate Poverty Now's](#) John Craig for the project's blog that discusses how he and his partner, Judy, are working to develop the classroom curriculum for the pilot program. To learn more about [Farmers of the Future](#), check out [Nourishing the Planet's](#) [interview](#) with Robin Ednick, Executive Director and Vice President of Pencils for Kids and John Craig last October.



One of the four major strategies of Eliminate Poverty Now is to promote economic development through agriculture, to encourage farmers to make the leap from subsistence farming to agribusiness. It requires changing what they grow, how they grow it and how they sell it. There's a more detailed description at our website if you're interested.

Problem is, many adults resist the change. They've raised the same crops in the same way for generations and they're often set in their ways. But children are open and receptive to new ideas.

The concept of Farmers of the Future is to teach children new approaches to farming through a combination of classroom teaching and first-hand experience in a mini-farm right outside their door. Think of it as one part classwork, one part 4-H club and one part Junior Achievement.

The first pilot site is already up and running. Judy described our visit to the Gueriguinde school last Monday. There, Pencils for Kids has installed a garden and a tree nursery, and the school already has plans for how to use the money they'll make from selling their crops.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, we held a meeting with 18 people to kick off development of the classroom curriculum. We had representatives from the National Ministry of Education; from ICRISAT (the plant research station headed by Dov Pasternak, the Israeli agricultural scientist who conceived Farmers of the Future); from FAO, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN; and from partner NGOs, including VIE, Eliminate Poverty Now and Pencils for Kids.

Over the course of 2 days we reviewed overall goals and strategies, sharpened our thinking on such critical issues as the topics to include, who should teach the material and how best to train them and provide technical support. We also hammered out a detailed budget and timetable to produce the material and complete teacher training by the start of the next school year in October.

I had the fun of leading the meeting. Given the size of the group, their diverse backgrounds, and their various agendas, it was no small feat to keep us on time and on track over two days of active discussion. And to deal with the language issues, we were all wearing headphones. We looked like a scene from the UN General Assembly. But we made it through and all felt pretty satisfied with what we accomplished.

Of course, the \$64,000 question is whether a program like this will actually work. Can we effectively teach children new methods of farming? More importantly, will they put those new methods into practice as adults?

The honest answer is "Maybe." We have a pretty good chance of getting kids to absorb the ideas.

Did you know that 4-H clubs in the States were formed 100 years ago to do exactly the same thing – work around adults and introduce modern agricultural practice to their children? And it worked!

As for getting kids to actually use their techniques as adults, the outlook is less rosy. Many attempts have been made to transfer modern technology to developing countries with less than stellar results. Often the problem is cost. What's affordable in one part of the world is too expensive in another. We'll have to be mindful of these challenges.

Nonetheless, we're all eager to move ahead with the pilot program. On the downside, we risk losing some time and money over the next few years. But if successful, we may have a transformative idea that helps thousands of young people make the leap from subsistence farming to agribusiness. It's worth a shot!

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