

African Farming Background

In all the African countries that Send a Cow works in, whether we provide cows, donkeys, sheep, goats or beehives, we train small scale rural farmers on how to get the most from their land or animals, using low-cost sustainable techniques.

Most rural African families have traditionally kept animals but have not always had the skills to improve their own livelihoods as a result of keeping them. They have also always grown their own food on small plots of land. However, both of these activities have continued to be increasingly challenging due to climate change, local difficulties, diminishing harvests on exhausted plots of land, disease and the effects of war. So, the natural farming training that Send a Cow gives is vitally important for many people as it helps them become more food secure in their environments.

Since Send a Cow specialises in agriculture, we can ensure the time, resources, and effort a family invests in livestock and small scale farming are well rewarded. We always give livestock that is suited to the terrain, climate and family's needs and abilities. No water, no cow! (But we will teach water harvesting or give smaller livestock instead.) And we give good quality animals, supplying plenty of milk, eggs or meat. Oxen and donkeys are used to plough land or transport goods and firewood, making life much easier for these rural farmers, especially the women who usually have to struggle with transporting heavy loads on their backs and heads.

Our Send a Cow African staff support the farmers by teaching them natural gardening techniques. This often means using manure and compost on the soil, making organic pesticides, using 'grey water' (used household water) and using simple gardening techniques – like bag and keyhole gardens. The composting of manure from their own livestock spares these families the need to buy expensive oil based chemical fertilisers which are more harmful to both their already fragile small plots and to the environment.

We also work with orphaned children who have lost their parents as a result of wars or disease, and with them, knowledge that would have been handed down. For these children day to day living can be quite a challenge as they have to fend for themselves, not knowing basic

ways of keeping alive and healthy. Usually the older sibling takes on the responsibility to care for several younger siblings. However, through Send a Cow, they are trained to make gardens or to look after livestock like chickens or goats which add to their diets and their incomes.

Once they learn these natural farming techniques from Send a Cow, the conditions of whole families are changed for the better. They get almost three times their regular food harvest plus plenty of milk, eggs and meat. Just one egg a day is a crucial supplement to a family's main diet of staple carbohydrates and greens. For children, pregnant women, malnourished people, and those with HIV/AIDS, a nutritious diet rich in minerals and vitamins is vital.

They often use the surplus milk, eggs, fruits, vegetables or young trees by selling them in the local market or sharing with neighbours. The extra income helps supplement the purchase of all other daily necessities that the families cannot directly get from their farms like school expenses*, soap, clothes, medicine, improving their home buildings and buying more land.

Plus, they get support from their communities by also giving and receiving from them. We always work through groups, building up their skills so that, within a few years, they can prosper without us. Our 'pass-on system' – whereby each family gives the first female offspring of their animal or shares what they have been taught of natural gardening techniques to another member – helps the group thrive. As a result an average of 10 relatives and neighbours adopt those techniques on their own land improving their own living conditions.

This kind of sustainable development is what Send a Cow continues to aim for all the rural African farmers that we work with. Despite the huge challenges that African farmers experience due to poverty, climate change and food crises, the work of Send a Cow gives farmers the skills they need to tackle these issues to have a brighter future.

* Although many African countries provide free primary school education, children are often not able to attend if they are not wearing uniform, have no books or pencils or if they are busy working at home.