MAB Advisory Board Members team up for Tractors for Africa

The following is a Q&A with Terry Garvert, MAB Advisory Board Member, Retired, and former work colleague of Terry Garvert, MAB Advisory Board Member, Retired, Region Operations Manager, John Deere Company, about their experiences with Tractors for Africa (TFA).

Dave Rock ('03), MAB Advisory Board Member, Retired, Region Operations Manager, John Deere Company, about their experiences with Tractors for Africa (TFA).

Tractors for Africa is an US-based nonprofit focused on mechanization and improving living standards for African farmers. TFA finds out-of-use tractors that are too small for American farms, refurbishes and ships them to farming cooperatives in Africa. They provide training on equipment and management, business management, and agronomy to help increase yields for African farmers.

In March 2019, Terry and Dave traveled to Ejura in central Ghana to conduct a three-day training workshop. Ejura has three TFA partner cooperatives, and each received a tractor and plow in early 2019. Workshop sessions included equipment use, safety, and maintenance, along with agronomy and business management.

Q. Why did you choose to volunteer with Tractors for Africa? How did you get involved?

Terry: I chose to volunteer with TFA shortly after I retired from Carrell three years ago. I had discussions with several former Carrell work colleagues who asked if I would be willing to help raise money for TFA. That turned into also working on sending, scouting metal parts and repainting farm equipment like plows, and disc harrows, as well as tractors. I also got involved in making a farm trailer from just an 8-ton 4-wheeler axle with another Carrell retiree. I really enjoyed spending time rehabbing farm equipment.

Dave: Terry contacted me looking for operation and maintenance training material for the John Deere 3020 tractor. Since those tractors were produced in the 1960s, if it had been available it would likely be in 35 mm slide format. I contacted Deere training and learned the files had been purged within the past 18 months. I told Terry I'd be glad to write a new program. Early in my Deere career, I was a writer and service instructor. It was a fun trip-down memory lane taking the information from an old operator's manual and creating a training program in PowerPoint. After I shared the file with Terry, he asked if I'd like to come along to Ghana to teach it - "heck yes!"

Q. What has the experience been like for you? Highlights?

Terry: I've really enjoyed the work, having regular board meetings with former work colleagues from Carrell, networking with others to find donors of farm equipment, and assist in bringing it to the Twin Cities to be reburbished and loaded onto 40 foot containers. I'm also still involved in grant writing and soliciting donors for financial aid. All of our current team members get involved in many facets of the project. We also have monthly board meetings to discuss the general direction of the program and update activities with the team. There are as many as 8-10 other former Carrell colleagues and family members, friends (including Dave) that get involved in one important way or another. I enjoy all of it and stay busy and engaged.

Dave: I contribute as a subject matter expert with equipment. Since ag mechanization in Ghana is limited, the support infrastructure is limited as well. There isn't a dealer, parts store or repair shop on every corner. A more robust inspection and get ready process prior to shipment has been developed. The logistics of obtaining parts and locating experienced technicians is a challenge. However, the resourcefulness of local mechanics is amazing. "MacGyver" is an accurate nickname to describe their ability to make repairs. I have also assisted with connections to John Deere and their dealer in Ghana, as well as exploring contacts to learn improved agronomic practices developed through local research efforts.

Q. What all did you do with the group while in Ghana?

Terry: Originally I was tasked with tractor training for the week in Ghana. In actually I sought out the help of Dave, with his lengthy career with John Deere and his prior experience when younger as a tractor mechanic and an editor in the tractor operations manuals for JD. He has become a subject matter expert for TFA, and I'm grateful he has stepped in so enthusiastically with our group. Dave has been a huge contributor and gives us great insights from his prior career experience. My efforts in Ghana served as a "trainer" where I rode along on the tractors with the students to make sure things like brakes, steering, hydraulics and use of PTO were done properly.

Dave: In addition to presenting the training, we visited the John Deere offices in Accra, held meetings with the farmer coops in their towns and the Catholic Bishop whose Diocese TFA is working with. We also visited a K-12 boarding school funded by the Staley family.

Q. What are your responsibilities with the organization?

Terry: Currently, I monitor the TFA website and respond back to questions on behalf of the organization. I'm also on the farm equipment and volunteer team where I help track down farm equipment, and assist in bringing it to the Twin Cities to be reburbished and loaded onto 40 foot containers. I'm also still involved in grant writing and soliciting donors for financial aid. All of our current team members get involved in many facets of the project. We also have monthly board meetings to discuss the general direction of the program and update activities with the team. There are as many as 8-10 other former Carrell colleagues and family members, friends (including Dave) that get involved in one important way or another. I enjoy all of it and stay busy and engaged.

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