

Close-up

Green Acres

Andrew Youn helps some of Kenya's poorest farmers improve their crop yields, so they can feed their families — and grow their own produce businesses.

One morning, while on a summer internship in Africa, Andrew Youn (KSM06) awoke on the floor of a mud hut in western Kenya. He watched as Getrude, a Kenyan farmer, gathered her six children and headed out to the field behind the hut.

The family spent the rest of the morning farming — plowing and tilling their acre of dense soil with nothing but a *jembe*, a hand tool that resembles a garden hoe. At noon one of the children combined a bit of flour and water in a bowl. The entire family drank the soupy mixture for lunch.

“That kind of need, which stretches in every direction, really compels you to try and make change,” Youn says, remembering that first trip to Africa.

Two years later Youn is back in Kenya, working among the country's poorest farmers with One Acre Fund, the nonprofit organization he dreamed up in business school. Working to combat poverty and starvation, the program supplies poor farmers, mostly women, with the basic tools to improve farming techniques, turn a profit and provide for their families.

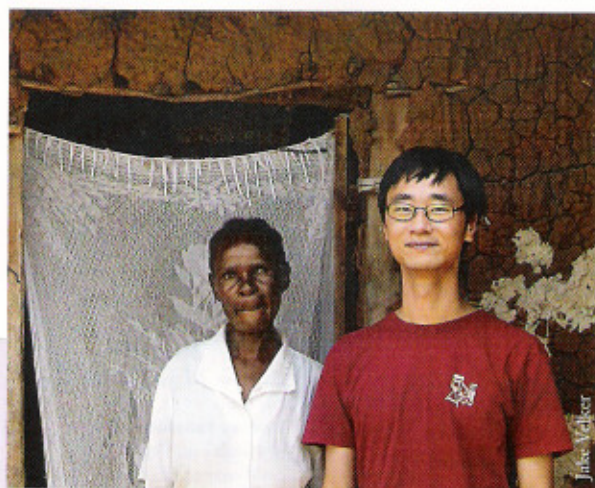
It costs One Acre Fund, based in Bungoma in western Kenya, \$240 to set up each farmer, most of whom are identified through collaboration with local self-help women's organizations. Many of the one-acre plots owned by these women and their families have suffered due to years of mismanagement and inadequate resources. Something as simple as fertilizer can go a long way to improve the quality of the terrain and help to increase crop yields.



One Acre Fund provides that fertilizer, along with a “bundle” of other services and equipment: fresh, environmentally sensitive seed, modern farming tools and advice from hired field agents who educate clients on how to maximize their harvest. The organization also works to connect the farmers to the marketplace, where the farmers can hopefully make some money.

“I strongly believe that poor people can help themselves and that the only permanent solution to poverty is if people earn their way out themselves,” Youn says. “Gifts and food are very good for

One Acre Fund, founded by Andrew Youn, right, helped Kenyan farmer Loice Khamala. Khamala planted with One Acre Fund and doubled her farm income in the first season.



emergency situations, but people who have been in generations of poverty need to be empowered to grow their own way out of it.”

In keeping with Youn's beliefs, One Acre Fund claims some of the crops as repayment for its services. The hope is that the farmers will eventually use the tools to become self-sufficient once the organization leaves.

“Andrew has a deep passion for helping people who are less fortunate, and he also has a strong business sense,” says friend and One Acre Fund board chair Matthew Forti (WCAS00, KSM06). “For him it's really thinking about how to use markets to solve socioeconomic problems.”

That passion for helping others, instilled in him by his Korean immigrant parents at a very young age, is precisely what compelled Youn to develop the One Acre concept for his business ventures class at Kellogg School of Management. Rather than abandon the project at the end of the academic term, Youn flew back to Kenya and invested \$7,000 out of his own pocket to fund a 40-family demonstration project.

“Not only is Andrew interested in doing this with other people's money,” Forti says, “he's really personally invested in this and believes this is a winning idea.”

Youn's enthusiasm has proved contagious. Today a quarter of his Kellogg class contributes monthly to the initiative. Since its inception One Acre has raised more than \$800,000 through entrepreneurial awards, grants and private donations.

In just a year and a half the program has gone from serving 40 families to more than 500 families. Youn hopes to reach 30,000 in the next three years. And One Acre has now expanded its program to farmers in southwestern Rwanda. All of this might seem a bit daunting, considering Youn's commitment to personal interaction.

“It's not uncommon for Andrew to sleep overnight in a hut that lacks water, electricity, mosquito nets,” Forti says.

For Youn the idea that he might help his clients out of generations of poverty more than makes up for a couple of uncomfortable nights and the sacrifice of a six-figure salary he could be earning with his Kellogg MBA.

He remembers paying a visit to a farmer who had made 70 cents a day working on someone else's land. “She was getting some cash for one of her passion fruit harvests. It was a lot of money for her — about \$15. She couldn't believe she was earning that much money for herself. The look in her eyes was just disbelief — it was too good to be true. And she's doing that herself,” Youn says. “Yeah, I was really satisfied that day.”

— Scott Sode (J08)