



THE STORY OF FOUNDATIONS FOR FARMING

By Brian Oldreive



Tobacco seed beds on Brian's farm in Tengwe, Zimbabwe.

In 1962 I left school and began a twenty-year career in tobacco farming, which I thoroughly enjoyed and in which I learnt much about the dynamics of farming. Not long after my wife, Cath, and I came to know Jesus as our Lord and Saviour in November of 1978, I began to have a real conscience about growing tobacco, a poison, for hundreds of thousands of people. One night when I couldn't sleep, I took out my bible and I read there from 1 Corinthians 10:31, "Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." I realized that my life's work of growing tobacco was not glorifying God and so in the

middle of that night I promised God that I would never grow another leaf of tobacco.

Here began our process of learning how to grow foodstuffs, but it was a great trial as God had a purifying work to do in us. God cannot use very ambitious, proud people as I was at the time. Cath and I were under the impression that we would immediately be blessed if we decided to grow food instead of tobacco, but God was wanting to test us and prepare us for what was to come. We had two terrible droughts, which resulted in poor yields, and we lost a lot of money. The bank inspectors came and said that if we continued to grow tobacco, they would support us, but if we would continued to grow foodstuffs on our sandveldt farm in a low rainfall area they would have to sell us up. I was even taken before the governors of the bank in Harare and I again had to state my conviction never to grow tobacco again. They insisted that I was very irresponsible to take this decision with a wife and five children to feed and educate, but I felt that I had to trust God and seek to glorify Him. We went through a humbling time as we lost everything including our reputation and status; however, it was a wonderful time in which God taught us to trust Him implicitly.

For a long time we couldn't find a job, but eventually we got a job managing Hinton Estate in Mutepatepa, north of Harare. When we arrived at this farm, it too was in financial difficulty. On this farm the common practice was to plough very deeply after having burnt off all the stover from the previous crop. This caused the soil structure to break down and large clods, the size of footballs, were being ploughed up, which then had to be broken down with two harrowings and two rollings, which was very expensive. The soil structure had collapsed resulting in water running off the surface and the topsoil washing away. Our costs were rising steeply, while our yields were going down and we were going out of business again. I turned to God in desperation for a solution to our problems.

I would go into the virgin bush for times of prayer and one day God began to reveal to me His ways in nature (Romans 1:19-22). There I saw that there is no mechanism in nature in which the soil is inverted and that there is a thick blanket of fallen leaves and grass which covers the surface of the soil. I realized that these two factors in nature prevented the soil from being washed away. I had heard something about Zero-Tillage, which had started in the Great Dust Bowl of Texas in the 1930s and spread to Europe, South America and Australia. It had been introduced into Africa in the early 70s and so I approached the research community to ask them how we could implement the system. They told me that they had tried it, but it

didn't work because it wasn't feasible for our region; however, I was in such a desperate situation that I thought that I must try and God gave me the faith to launch out.

I decided that as I began to experiment with this system, I would not allow it to fail from lack of good management. So I decided to begin small with just one hectare of maize planted into wheat straw to the highest standards possible. All we used was a small work force using a hoe to make planting holes straight into the wheat straw from the previous crop. The results on this small portion were so much better than the rest of the crops under conventional tillage that I had the faith to expand the area under Zero-Tillage to



Maize grown using FfF principles on Hinton Estate.

two hectares. This was again so successful that we expanded it further to one full land the following year and within six years the whole farm of 1,000 hectares was under Zero-Tillage. The success of the system resulted in profits every year and we were able to buy up surrounding farms until in 1995 we were growing 3,500 hectares under mechanized Zero-Tillage.

As we began to see the wonderful success of the system, God began to reveal to us the poverty situation in Africa and he told us that he did not reveal it to us just for ourselves, but for the rural poor of Africa. We then began an outreach programme in which we set up 58 demonstration plots throughout Zimbabwe in all natural regions and soil types. We saw that the system, when implemented well, could be successful in any region except desert regions where there simply wasn't enough rainfall. However, we began to see that as soon as we left an area the crops would deteriorate immediately and there would not be the same effectiveness that occurred under our management. This caused us to go to God and ask Him why this was the case. We began to realize that the people we reached didn't lack knowledge of the methodology, but that their ability to actually implement that knowledge into a profitable farming enterprise was lacking.



Brian with a group of school children near Hinton Estate.

I could see that this lack was the cause of Africa being the poorest continent on earth, getting poorer and I went to God wrestling with him in prayer about it. I asked him how we could come out of poverty. He answered me in a way that doesn't sound very spiritual and he said, "Teach Africa to make a profit." This is our bottom line. If our expenditure exceeds our income, we are making a loss. That happens from the micro level for the individual in the field, right up to the corporate level, to national level and ultimately to a continental level. I then turned to the Father and asked Him how we can make a profit. He answered me in a wonderful way and said that there are three things to do to make a profit. Everything we do should be done

on time
at standard
without wastage.

If we get those three factors right invariably, God willing, we will make a profit. We must be honest that in Africa, we are often late, our standards are often way behind the rest of the world's and there is much wastage. God is saying to us that we should have faith to change those ethics and values and apply them in a godly way to a whole continent. It is a huge challenge, but we have a huge God and there is no giant too big for the Lord.

God later on gave us a fourth principle which deals with the work ethic, productivity levels and output from our labour. This is that we should do everything 'with joy'. We see from the book of Nehemiah that our joy is our strength. Once we understand that it's a joy to farm well and when we see our standards improving and our timing is good, hope comes into our hearts. Once hope is there, this results in joy and joy is our strength. Thereby wonderful productivity and energy is increased and our whole system begins to improve and to move forwards. Our very simple implementation management teaching then became centred around these four principles:

on time
at standard
without wastage
with joy.

God began to reveal other things to us as we turned to him for answers. We continued to be saddened by the desperate poverty around us and we continued to turn to God to ask him why Africa is the poorest continent on earth getting poorer. When I looked through the scriptures, two scriptures were highlighted for us, the Parable of the Talents (Matt 25) and Luke 6:38. Basically in Matt 25 Jesus talks about how if we are faithful with little God will add to us. If we are unfaithful like the servant with one talent, what little we have will be taken away. We have traveled widely in Africa and we have come to believe that our basic problem is that we have not been faithful with the very first things that God has given us in the soil, sunshine, rainfall and seed. If we are faithful with that, then that will be the beginning of our rebuild. Our unfaithfulness is the reason why Africa is getting poorer in real terms, and the Lord shows in Matthew 25 that if we are unfaithful he takes away from us. This is why we are getting poorer in spite of \$2,000 billion of free aid over the last 50 years.

Luke 6:38 talks about how we must give to receive. We do not promote the prosperity gospel or selfish intent, but God loves a giving heart and he loves unselfishness. This outworks itself practically in farming in that we must feed our crops with some sort of fertilization if we expect it to give us a crop. We also receive a far greater yield when we are willing to give of our time, energy and extra effort to achieve excellent standards. Sadly, Africa has earned the reputation of being a begging continent, expecting to get without giving in return. This is totally contrary to the ways of the Kingdom: "...give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the



Soya Beans on Hinton Estate using FfF principles.



Wheat being harvested on Hinton Estate.



Sugar cane grown on Hinton Estate using FfF principles.

measure you use it will be measured back to you.” For Africa to begin to receive we must first learn to give of our time, energy, extra effort and finances.

God has graciously revealed these powerful truths to us and it is our prayer that through these teachings and their faithful implementation in farming, Africa will have a strong base from which to build thriving and sustainable economies.