

Haiti Project Update

by Gene Kraay

The Haiti Project is poised to have a banner year in support of the Guepard Boxing Club (GBCCS) in Cité Soleil, Haiti, considered the poorest and most violent ghetto in the Western Hemisphere. “We survived the winter,” reports Desert Rose Board Vice-Chair Dwight Cox, “and we were committed to have 12,000 sq.ft. planted as we entered June. Mission accomplished.”

Last year, the project generated enough revenue to pay for a full month of meals for the 300 children GBCCS serves. “We made up the balance with generous contributions from a small but committed group of supporters, so we were able to feed the children for the entire year,” Cox concludes.



Late summer 2021

In 2021, Dwight and I planted 5,000 seeds. Of those seeds, 273 (5%) survived and produced over 1,900 individual vegetables – notably okra and Armenian cucumbers – that we sold in farmer’s markets operated by James Wilson of Black Orchard Farms, the other farmer who works three of the 20 acres dedicated to the DRBI agriculture program. In 2021, the Haiti Project worked 3,000 sq.ft. of the 48,000 sq.ft. (approx. 1 acre) and we continue to expand the fenced-in growing area.

We learned much about the challenges of growing vegetables through the winter months and despite cold temperatures and reduced sunlight we managed a small crop of bok choy, collards, beets, and kale. Spring planting started in March and plant survivability increased to 20% with cucumbers and melons reaching harvest in July.



Late spring 2022

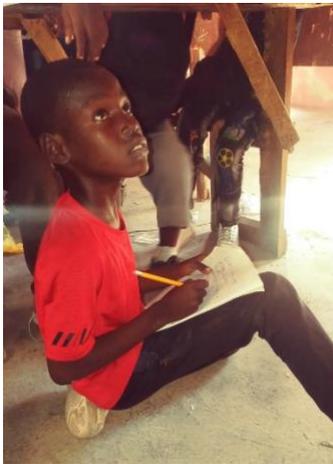


Cucumber seedling 2022

Patience and commitment are essential to the success of the program. Every seed that breaks through the surface in the hoop house is a victory as well as every transplant that thrives when the seedlings are moved into the open plot. We tend our plants every day without exception and remain committed to our objective of raising crops in the desert to support the kids in Haiti.

We often contemplate on their Hohokam forebears who successfully worked the same land over 1,000 years ago. After all, if the Hohokam could raise beans, corn, and squash in the desert as early as 300AD without power tools, wells, and tractors, we should be able to do it now with the technological assists we have access to.

As the Haiti Project grows stronger and sinks deeper roots in the desert, GBCCS has expanded services in Cité Soleil despite increased violence and gang activity in a country in search of effective government and security. Justin Ricot and his friend Benoit Stevenson manage GBCCS activity in Haiti. We all agree that education is the means to improve life in Haiti and everywhere else on the planet. As we entered the new year, Justin presented a plan to open a school in the ghetto for homeless children and other children who cannot afford it. We opened the doors in February and our student body has grown to 300 children.



Attentive student

Justin named the school “*Lekòl Pye Atè,*” the Barefoot School. The school is open five days each week, and GBCCS provides each student with a hot meal at the conclusion of the school day. The school year concludes at the end of June, and Justin hopes to offer a ‘summer camp’ of sorts to keep the children occupied and safe during the summer. GBCCS continues to conduct physical education on Saturdays. As it has in the past, GBCCS prepares a meal for the children after each session.

Fifty percent of adults in Haiti cannot sign their names and so the Barefoot School is contemplating adult education this fall as well. Justin shares his personal experience, “*Exactly, I remember my mother can’t sign name now she do it well like she drink water. She do it because she back to school (Alfabetisation) but now she perfect to sign name.*” Although

Justin’s English is not perfect – but FAR better than my Creole – the reader gets the idea. Alfabetisation is the tip of the iceberg and gives us a place to start.

As GBCCS expands its services in Haiti, the success of the Haiti Project at DRBI becomes increasingly important. Last year exposed the light at the end of the tunnel and with each successive year, that light becomes brighter, our field becomes greener, and the children’s smiles become broader.