

# Alumni Spotlight: Tractors for Africa



## MAB Advisory Board Members team up for Tractors for Africa

The following is a Q&A with **Terry Garvert**, MAB Advisory Board Member, Retired, Grain and Oilseed Supply Chain NA, Cargill, Inc., and **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 non-profit 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 maintenance, 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 Cargill three years ago. I had discussions with several former Cargill work colleagues who asked if I would be willing to help raise money for TFA. That turned into also working on sanding, scouring metal parts and repainting farm equipment like plows, and disc harrows, as well as tractors. I



*Dave Rock ('03) listens to questions during a Tractors for Africa training session.*

also got involved in making a farm trailer from just an 8-ton 4-wheeled axle with another Cargill retiree. I really enjoyed spending time rehabbing farm equipment.

**Dave:** Terry contacted me looking for operation and maintenance training materials 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 Cargill, networking with others to find donors of farm equipment, as well as financial donors gives me something to look forward to on top of helping subsistence farmers improve their opportunities to dramatically improve their farm yield. We've tracked yield improvements and have generally been able to raise maize yields by nearly double through ag mechanization and improved tillage of the soil alone. There will be more with exposure to

fertilization and then better plant genetics down the road to further increase yields.

**Dave:** The opportunity to work with TFA and the farmer coops in Ghana is very rewarding. It's been an unexpected add to my retirement portfolio of giving back. I spent my career supporting the advancement of ag mechanization to increase the productivity of crop production. It's easy to take ag mechanization for granted. In the USA, not having GPS guidance, yield mapping or variable rate is considered lagging. Imagine manual tillage, planting, care and harvest as standard operating procedure, not for your garden but for crop production. Affordable access to a tractor for tillage is a significant advancement for the Ghana farmers we work with.

I spent many hours driving my Dad's 3020 on the farm and then I worked in a John Deere dealership repairing them. That was over 40 years ago. That experience seemed like only yesterday, as I leveraged it to teach the classes. We held the training sessions at Ejura Ag College. It was a nice facility that had been built with USAID funds in the 1960s. Having the farmers and tractor operators crowd around the tractor, ask questions and develop their ability to safely drive the tractor was a highlight, though a bit scary at times as "STOP!" and "CLUTCH!" didn't always work.

Another highlight was riding with a farmer on his motorcycle to visit his farm field several miles from town. Imagine locating a farm field where there

are no section lines, fences or farm-to-market roads beyond winding paths off the pavement. The trees left in the fields all looked the same. The trees provide shade for the field workers so they are hesitant to remove them.

### 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 in to the Twin Cities to be rehabbed 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 Cargill 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 actuality 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.



*Left: Terry Garvert with Matilda Exorman Egbenya, Extension Manager for Masara N' Arziki Coop, one of the cooperatives TFA has placed equipment with in Tamale, Ghana*

*Right: The group started the three-day session with a morning walk around the tractor to talk about maintenance issues.*



## Want to get involved?

**Terry:** Volunteers and equipment will always be needed. As we go forward, we are defining our farm equipment standards and trying to make sure the equipment goes overseas in very good condition, but sourcing John Deere 3020's, which at this time we have selected as our primary targeted tractor, can always use a shot in the arm. Others can get involved by contacting me as equipment and volunteer team member, and we can discuss ways that a person can help.

**Dave:** Tractors for Africa is always looking for leads on good used equipment—JD3020's and mounted equipment such as rippers and planters. Also, financial support would be welcome.

*For more information on Tractors for Africa, please contact Terry Garvert at [terry.garvert@tractorsforafrica.org](mailto:terry.garvert@tractorsforafrica.org) or visit [tractorsforafrica.org](http://tractorsforafrica.org).*