

INVESTOR REPORT

Summer 2015

emerging market **BUSINESS** in sustainable food & agriculture

Relentless Forward Progress

A Note from Rich Johnson, CEO & Co-founder, Spark Ventures



Cacao trees
to be planted
in Nicaragua

Spark Ventures started as a business plan I wrote after a trip with two friends to Zambia in 2006. At the core of that plan was the idea that we could leverage philanthropic support and opportunities for travel to create a more sustainable model for international development. It is thanks to your support of that vision that we have achieved many milestones, changed many lives and are poised for great impact in the years ahead.



Computers
leveraged for
learning in Zambia

As we look to the future, the upcoming cacao investment is critical component to executing our model in Nicaragua. You will learn more about that as well as a meaningful expansion of the educational programs in Zambia - thanks to Spark travelers and supporters who invested their time, expertise and resources. Finally, it's with great pleasure we introduce you to our newest team member. Tina Erickson, our Vice President of Development joins the dedicated staff, board and supporters, like you as together we bring that business plan I wrote nine years ago to life.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Rich Johnson'.

Cacao anchors our agribusiness investment in Nicaragua



Honey and plantains will provide short-term returns on investment

Farm profits support 150+ youth with high-impact programming.



Cacao Farming: Seeding Success

Three Crops, Three Returns

Spark Venture's investment in Nicaragua is an agribusiness - Las Tías Ventures. This farm, when it reaches its full potential, will fully fund our social impact partner, Las Tías - serving over 150 children with high-impact community programming. To get to that point, Spark has done some diversifying.

Those who have followed our work for the past three years know that our team has built up significant knowledge around poultry farming, from our work in Zambia. With agriculture the focus of the farm in Nicaragua, we have broadened our expertise significantly. While chickens are produced on a 6-week cycle, cacao, the primary crop to be cultivated at Las Tías Ventures will take 3 years to yield fruit. The trees will reach peak production in year 10 and then continue to produce for 20 years or more.

But Spark isn't content to wait 3 years to see a return on our investment. So, in the interim, as we plant and cultivate the cacao trees, like in any good investment - we're diversifying. We have already launched our honeybee operations and this season, when we plant cacao, we will also be planting plantain trees which will both shade the cacao plants as well as provide revenue for the farm in year one.

With this crop mix, and the potential for additional crops to be added, we are confident that the farm will provide financial returns in the short and long term - ensuring Las Tías' community programming for years to come.



Computer Facilities, and the Skills to Use Them

Updates to the **Zambian Computer Lab** are Timed with **Computer Literacy Training for the Staff**

Thanks to some specific grants and in-kind donations, there are now over 10 computers that live in a small computer room housed at Hope, Spark's Zambian social impact partner. However, as is exemplary of the Spark Ventures' approach, providing the school with the physical resource of computers was not where the story ends - it is just the beginning.

We prioritize empowerment of our partners to build the long-term capacity that will allow them to grow professionally and organizationally. Having computers is one step, but truly being able to leverage them and maximize their potential impact on our partner's community programming is a whole other piece of the puzzle. To that end, this past May, all the teachers in the school underwent Spark funded computer training - introducing them to the basics of word processing and other key computer skills. This will ease their work as teachers and ultimately empower them to share computer knowledge and skills with the older students at Hope Community School.

On our Zambia Impact Trip this summer, funds from the travelers were dedicated to the final pieces needed to round out the computer lab. Travelers helped install two new printers, 3 donated laptops, and most excitingly, connected the school's computer lab with consistent WiFi internet.

Pairing their training with the important new physical resources, Hope Community School teachers now have the professional skills needed to allow them to be even more effective educators. Older students at Hope will also be able to use the computers for research and additional learning.

When the internet was connected, the first thing Head Teacher N'goma did was Google "Spark Ventures" – he was thrilled to find our website!



With computers updated, connected to the internet, and ready to be used, the staff at Hope Community School is poised to make significant updates in their efficiency as teachers.



Meet Our Newest Team Member

Spark Ventures Welcomes Tina Erickson

The Spark Ventures team couldn't be more excited to expand - bringing on fundraising expert, Tina Erickson, as our new Vice President of Development. Tina will marshal resources to keep our operations thriving, and expand our impact. We asked her a few questions on day one:



What brought you to Spark Ventures?

I have worked in the Chicago area nonprofit community for over 20 years, in a diversity of organizations from academia to human services to a private foundation. I most recently served as the vice president for advancement at a university, where I was actively involved in a global health initiative, community outreach efforts and securing scholarship support to expand student diversity. After making an important contribution there, I wanted a new challenge and wished to return to an organization that is having a major impact on the lives of those in greatest need in our world.

Would you share a professional accomplishment you are proud of and why?

As the vice president of development and external relations at a human service organization, I oversaw fundraising for a capital campaign and expansion, resulting in \$35 million in contributions during my six-year tenure. I look forward to bringing those experiences to bare on Spark Ventures' present and future plans. I was also pleased to initiate Legacy Societies at previous organizations, which facilitated planned giving options by donors.

What do you enjoy when you are not working?

Outside of the professional sphere, I enjoy traveling with my family, reading, and caring for several rescued animals with my daughter and husband at our home in a Chicago suburb.

What are you most excited about in your first six months at Spark?

I can't wait to see our work in action on one of Spark's Impact Travel Trips. I spent four years abroad working in education in Japan and the Czech Republic and have traveled extensively, so I know the powerful impact a cross-cultural experience can have on someone. Want to join me for a trip? Check out your options at sparkventures.org/travel - I'll be on our Women's Leadership Trip to Nicaragua in February.

Want to connect with Tina? You can reach her at the Spark office, 773-293-6710 or at terickson@sparkventures.org



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