

Growers First

Over a billion people in developing countries live on less than \$1 per day, mostly in agricultural communities. They want what we all want: healthy children, a decent living, hope for the future and the opportunity to realize their dreams. Yet most of these farmers struggle to provide even subsistence living for their families, and have little or no access to basic health care and education. Working at the ground level, Growers First implements programs that help meet their needs.

Growers First is an advocate and partner for developing world small-plot growers and their families. We serve two crucial needs: First, at the farm level, we implement a variety of educational and training programs that help build strong communities and keep families together by improving their quality of life. And second, throughout the supply chain, we negotiate relationships that help connect small plot farmers directly to the commodity markets, thus empowering them to earn a workable living from their own land.



History of Growers First

More than 20 years ago, Dave Day, the founder of Growers First witnessed first hand the economic and social injustices that fell upon small coffee growers in Mexico. Dave was involved in the coffee business at the time and discovered that, while coffee represents the largest cash crop and agricultural revenue stream in the world, small indigenous growers received a disproportionately low percentage of that revenue. This resulted in growers, their families and villages struggling in a subsistence life of poverty and constant need.



In 2000 Dave began addressing inequities in agricultural markets and providing small growers the ability to work collectively and a means of achieving an overall better quality of life. It wasn't simply giving money to poor farmers – it was something infinitely more valuable. It was hope. Hope for a way to better provide for their families over the long term. Hope for a better life for their children. Hope for a self-sustaining and even growing stream of revenue that could be passed on to, or expanded with their children. Through improved agronomical practices, over time, annual income of small growers typically increases from 300% to 500% above previous levels – lifting them out of poverty for the first time in their lives.

Even with the improved farming capabilities, there remained many unmet needs amongst the families and the villages. Dave discovered an interrelatedness amongst the various needs and designed the Growers First model to incorporate a more encompassing approach to meeting those other needs. In addition to the sustainable economic benefits of improved farming, this included social enterprise and equity through cooperative development, the multi-faceted benefits of environmentally sustainable practices, education and training along with health and wellness care. This approach was directed at the lowest rung on the supply chain ladder – the growers and their families – which in turn spread upward and outward synergistically to the community, village and regional areas that Growers First operates in. Beginning in [Oaxaca, Mexico](#), Growers First programs have



spread around the world, to include [Indonesia](#), [Rwanda](#), and [Honduras, Mexico](#) and incorporates other tree crop products in addition to coffee. In all these areas, Growers First programs have resulted in sustainable higher incomes for small farmers, creation of new jobs in the community, and an overall improvement in the social and economic quality of life of the grower and his family.

How Growers First Works

At Growers First, our programs are focused on the ground level grower and on facilitating an overall improvement in their economic and social quality of life. Our programs are in support of five foundational initiatives under which we operate:



- **Economic Sustainability** – Helping growers create micro-enterprises that create an improved revenue stream with ongoing growth potential.
- **Social Enterprise and Equity** – Forming and shaping cooperatives within grower communities which synergistically improves the incomes of growers and assures equality and empowerment of all members.
- **Environment** – Training and educating growers on practices which have a more positive impact on the environment and also on the profitability of their crops.
- **Education** – Supporting efforts in the community to increase skills that improve basic knowledge and capabilities as well as those relevant to the success of their enterprises.
- **Health and Wellness** - Providing self-help training as well as facilitating hands-on medical/ dental treatment and compassionate care.

Growers First employs a systematic approach to program implementation over time. Some programs have immediate impact and produce an immediate increase in income potential for growers. Other activities, running in parallel form the foundation upon which other longer term programs can be built which produce ongoing, sustainable social and economic benefit. Traceability is key to Growers First's approach. From the beginnings in Mexico, Growers First collected baseline data on individual growers and their families. The very process of the data collection demonstrates to the farmer that we care and helps to engender a relationship of open communication and trust. Over the years, updates to our data base have been conducted and serve as the basis for the statistical averages and outcomes which appear throughout our website underscoring the improvements in the lives of the growers we serve. The ability to trace the transformation of our work makes Growers First a valuable partner to businesses and other NGOs as well as a credible choice for the discerning donor. Growers First is a 501(C) 3 organization that seeks to support the UN's Millennium Development Goals through programs aimed at economic sustainability, empowerment through social equity, and creating a place at the table for the world's poor. For further information, contact Monica Prado – monica@growersfirst.org.

