

## Application for Battaglia Fund Matching Grant

### **Applicant**

Haiti Outreach Foundation, Inc. (HOF) partnering with Blue Ridge Community College (BRCC) Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE)

### **Background and Project Description**

Of the approximately 600 families living in Pointe-a-Raquette, 1/3 are living in desperation. These families are the poorest of the poor and generally eat every other day. We plan a sustainable agriculture project, which will enable these families to grow food. We will start with a pilot of 10 families and gradually involve the others. At completion, the project will involve the 200 poorest families. However, the information provided to these 200 families will be made available to all the residents of Pointe-a-Raquette through a community meeting. The effects of the project will improve the lives of community residents in general, not merely those residents who are actively involved in this project.

To prepare for this project, a prototype garden was established at BRCC in July 2008 to approximate as far as possible the conditions and available materials in Pointe-a-Raquette. We had originally planned to use tires to form the perimeter of the gardens, but quickly learned that this was not feasible given the difficulty of cutting through steel belted tires. The prototype was prepared with cement blocks for the perimeter, bricks on the garden floor to approximate the limestone, pebbles for drainage, and poor quality soil. Radishes, squash and flowers were planted with good results. While these conditions cannot fully compare to those in Pointe-a-Raquette, the logistics of garden preparation have been adequately tested.

Fonel Xavier is a young man from Pointe-a-Raquette who recently graduated from a two-year agronomy program paid for by a private donor. He will work for HOF in Pointe-a-Raquette on this (and other) projects for the next two years to repay his school debt. He will teach the people about composting, double planting and crop rotation to insure the maximum use of the soil.

The soil in Pointe-a-Raquette is limestone and it is very difficult to grow any crops in this soil. The families will be taught how to prepare raised beds for gardening. Each family will be provided with 14 standard sized cement blocks, which will be used to provide a perimeter for the planned growing space. They will prepare a bed of crushed shells to a depth of 6 inches to allow drainage. When the bed is prepared, we will fill the bed with soil which will be brought down from the mountains. Fonel Xavier will teach the families to enrich the soil through composting. We had considered worm farming to provide worm excrement for fertilizer, but following extensive research, it is clear that worm propagation is not feasible given the severe problems with the availability of

water for any purpose other than human consumption during six months of each year. The soil will be enriched through composting for a minimum of three months during the end of the dry season and will be ready for planting in the spring of 2009. The families will be provided with seeds for the 2009-growing season. As they harvest their crops, they will decide if they wish to use all of their produce for their family or take some to market. Each family will need to conserve some seeds for the following year or use the money from selling their produce to purchase seeds for the following year.

To start the project, we will contract with Square Foot Gardening (SFG), a non-profit organization that works with people all over the world to teach them to best utilize the space and resources available for growing crops. SFG will supply a speaker to conduct a community meeting in Pointe-a-Raquette to explain the process to all the residents of the town. All families, not just the 200 poorest families selected for participation in this project, will benefit from the information and will be able to set up raised gardens following the guidelines.

#### **Time frame for the project**

We plan to travel to Pointe-a-Raquette in January 2009 to start work on the project. We will hold the community meeting with a speaker from SFG at that time. We will provide the cement blocks and soil, and families will start to prepare their soil beds in January 2009. Fonel Xavier will teach composting, and the soil should be ready for planting by spring. The seeds will be planted as soon as the rainy season begins. In Pointe-a-Raquette, this is usually sometime in May. We should see results in the summer of 2009.

#### **Project Budget**

See attached budget

#### **Matching amount contributed by the partnership**

We are requesting \$5000.00 in matching funds from the Battaglia Fund. The partnership will contribute \$5000.00: \$3500.00 from BRCC SIFE (letter of intent attached) and \$1500.00 from HOF (funds already received).

#### **Benefit to the community**

The 200 poorest families in Pointe-a-Raquette, site of St. Louis Parish, will benefit by having additional food which can be used to supplement their meager diets and having an opportunity to make some money by selling any excess produce at market.

#### **Benefit to the economy of Haiti through sustainability of the project**

This project is planned for long-term results. With continuing instruction from Fonel Xavier, families will be able to plant a new garden every year. They will have food for their families, excess produce to sell at market, and the knowledge that they are becoming self-sufficient in their ability to provide a

local economy without outside contributions. As the success of the gardens increase, the families should have some disposable income to spend. This will enhance the overall economy on the Island. The economic improvement should continue each year. As noted, the families will keep seeds from the previous year's harvest to plant the following year. With ongoing composting, the soil will continue to improve. Fonel Xavier will provide continuing education for the families to enhance their produce yield each year.

### **Ecological sustainability**

Over time, composting will improve the soil. There will be leaching of nutrients from the rich soil into the underlying limestone. We will be using only materials that are readily available on the Island.

### **Training and Education**

As described above, SFG will provide a speaker for a community-wide meeting to introduce the project and allow all residents access to the information required to start a raised garden. Fonel Xavier, a graduate of the agronomy school, will work with each family to teach them how to compost, plant appropriate crops, and rotate crops to maximize soil use. He will provide on-going instruction and feedback for the 200 families who participate in the project.

### **Haitian twin/partner and Richmond twin/partner collaboration**

HOF and Father Roosevelt have been planning a sustainable agriculture project for Pointe-a-Raquette for several years. A big problem has been the lack of a qualified educator, but we now have Fonel Xavier. We had been waiting until he finished his training, since we feel that having a trained teacher presents the best chance for success. We have attempted to promote composting for several years, but this is not a cultural norm, and on-site supervision is necessary. In addition, we have been discussing raised gardens for several years since the limestone is not conducive to growing crops. We have determined that more fertile soil from the mountains can be brought to the coast by the parish truck.

### **Involvement of the benefitting community**

200 families will learn how to best utilize better soil to provide food for their families through family gardens. In addition to the families who will be provided with the materials for the raised garden project, all interested residents of Pointe-a-Raquette will benefit by attending the community meeting at which the SFG speaker will explain the process of square foot gardening. All residents will be able to use these ideas to create their own raised beds.

### **Anticipated outcomes**

Anticipated outcomes are better nutrition for these 200 families and any other families who take advantage of the information offered to them, improvement

in the economic situation in Pointe-a-Raquette, and, most importantly, a feeling of ownership and accomplishment for those involved in the project.

**Methods of evaluation of the project**

We will evaluate food availability and overall health of the townspeople after implementation. Fonel Xavier will determine approximately how much additional food is grown. Dr. Medjine DuBois of Bob's Clinic in Pointe-a-Raquette will assist in determining overall improvement in the health of those families who participate in the project