



PHOTOS: CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES

## RWANDAN FARMER'S YIELD DOUBLES AFTER FARMER-TO-FARMER TRAINING



It might seem strange that a Pennsylvania farmer was boarding a plane to Kigali, Rwanda, to go to work. But that's exactly what Leah Tewksbury did in March 2019, when she traveled to Rwanda to volunteer for USAID's Farmer-to-Farmer program with F2F implementer, Catholic Relief Services.

As a small-scale farmer using intensive practices focused on replenishing soil fertility within the surrounding ecosystem, Tewksbury is well equipped to assist horticulture farmers around the world.

"We have been farming using regenerative practices for 20 years," says Tewksbury, who shares farm duties with her husband, who is also a kindergarten teacher. She has completed five volunteer assignments in Africa and Latin America.

On this assignment, Tewksbury trained Africa Food Supply Limited, an enterprise in southern Rwanda that sells farm supplies, provides training in vegetable production, and helps farmers connect to markets to sell their crops. AFS Ltd. also grows vegetables on its own 20 acres of land.

The AFS Ltd. mission is to provide high quality, nutritious foods including fresh vegetables, fruit, cassava, and orange sweet potatoes to markets in Kigali. Yet AFS Ltd. was experiencing challenges with both production and harvesting and requested training to address these issues. To truly help the small-scale farmers they were assisting, AFS Ltd. needed to improve their own practices first.

When Tewksbury first arrived, she sat down with AFS Ltd. leadership to learn more about their challenges. She also



observed some opportunities for training. “I saw widespread bare soils that were heavily tilled and degraded,” she says. AFS Ltd. was eager to work with Tewksbury to create test plots to try out regenerative growing methods.

During her time in Rwanda, Tewksbury stressed the importance of caring for the soil by replenishing organic matter to increase fertility, covering raised beds to retain precious moisture, producing quality seedlings, and dealing with pests in non-toxic ways. She worked with leaders of AFS Ltd. and some of the small-scale farmers they serve. Tewksbury was impressed with how involved participants were, and said that if they followed recommended practices, she anticipated they would “see a remarkable increase in production.”

Almost a year later, Tewksbury’s phone pinged with a message from Rose, a farmer with AFS Ltd. who had trained with Tewksbury. “We doubled the harvest of watermelon, eggplant, and cabbage. It’s amazing!” Rose said. Mulching her raised beds made all the difference for Rose.

In the wider AFS Ltd. community, success continues. After following Tewksbury’s recommendations, AFS and the farmers they serve are experiencing increased yields, im-

proved soil health and less erosion, fewer pest and disease pressures, improved ecological health of the entire area, and reduced use of toxic sprays and synthetic fertilizers.

Tewksbury believes in the effectiveness of the F2F program to improve farmers’ lives and the ecosystems in which they farm. “We are doing good work in the world to make agriculture more sustainable – for all living things,” she says. “Teaching soil health practices is critical to the long-term health and success of communities around the world.”

