



“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

Isaiah 55:9



In Step With Providence

The hope of springtime has been dampened as COVID-19 grips the nations in a global pandemic. Yet in the midst of this uncertainty, God’s faithfulness is constant and He continues to move in North Korea through generous support and prayer.

The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps. - Proverbs 16:9

God works through every detail and has plans prepared before we can even comprehend His purpose.

We saw these marvelous plans unfold through our shipments last year as we were able to ship 400 metric tons of Canadian non-GMO soybeans to North Korea, which is double what we had sent the previous year (interestingly, enough to allow us to respond to a disaster if necessary). Little did we know what purpose this would serve for 2020.

In September 2019, the team visited nearly every district where First Steps

works--the northern regions and both east and west coasts. As on all of our confirmation visits, we encountered deep gratitude expressed by our resilient partners and beneficiaries. We experienced the look of joy, returning health, and the bright eyes of precious children we serve. We witnessed how a cup of soymilk provides strength and nutrition to children who are undernourished and heard relieved mothers attest to how Sprinkles are

improving the health of their babies as well as their own.

It had been our intention to confirm the remaining 100 tonnes (out of 400) of soybeans in Nampo during the visit, but we were unable to confirm its arrival. The beans were still in the port and even our counterparts in North Korea said they were inaccessible. Though

it made no sense at the time, I told myself it was fine and that we would see them on our next visit.



Mask donned, smile on, in Nampo Soymilk Factory.

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On our next visit in late November, we were finally able to see the beans and allocate them to locations according to need. But we still hadn't seen them at their final destination and requested that they not be consumed until our next visit. We were simply not yet aware of how God was working in His perfect timing.

Fast forward to January, when the world was just waking up to news of a mysterious new virus spreading like wildfire in China. North Korea shut its borders. Nothing and no one is allowed in or out. As the situation progressed, it became increasingly clear that there was no way to get our next shipment of beans or Sprinkles into the country as scheduled. But even this perplexing problem that has created so much global disruption, God had foreseen. It can only be God in His grace and providence that led First Steps to send extra beans, keep them in storage, and

then delay our monitoring of them, so that they would be available when a time of great hardship arrived.

Currently, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which this pandemic is affecting the people of North Korea. What we do know is that given the fragile health care system, an epidemic would be disastrous to the people of North Korea. As the supply chains into the country have been drastically reduced, we are especially concerned for the 40% of the population that is already chronically malnourished. In addition, we know that the 2019 growing season was devastating for many communities. Soybeans and other crops had small yields or none at all and North Korea faces hardships beyond ongoing food shortages.

It is our priority to continue our soymilk and Sprinkles programs to help prevent malnutrition in vulnerable women and children. We are immensely grateful for the extra soybeans that we were able to distribute. God is faithful and has not forgotten the people of North Korea. As the world continues to respond to this pandemic, whether in fear and despair, or in hope and courage, may we continue to place our trust in a God who knows our needs and works all things for the good of those who love Him.

Susan Ritchie
Executive Director



A vibrant field among the barren landscapes of Tongchon.

First Steps at a Glance

For nearly twenty years, First Steps, a Vancouver-based charity, has been serving children and women in North Korea. Since its inception, the mission of First Steps has been to reach the most vulnerable with life-giving nutrition. Today, First Steps provides more than 100,000 children with a daily cup of nutrient-rich soymilk, and 20,000 pregnant and nursing mothers and their babies, with micronutrient sachets called Sprinkles.

In North Korea, malnutrition and food shortages are a part of everyday life. The government gives priority to children in daycares, kindergartens and orphanages; however, in years of drought and floods even they aren't immune to shortages. One in five children aged five or under are suffering from stunted growth.



Each First Steps bag holds 30 kg of non-GMO Canadian Soybeans.





Long days, Little Lives and Motherly Love

It was a long bumpy road that led us out from Tongchon, a beautiful city located on the east coast, to Botan-ri. Green cabbage fields covered the otherwise brown landscape and bright orange persimmons dotted the mountainous skyline.

It was our first time visiting Botan-ri Daycare, where Jin Soon had been the Director for 6 months. “There are more things I don’t know than I do know so there’s a big learning curve,” she said as the group of local officials and the First Steps team talked over a plate of dried persimmons. “Raising kids is rewarding

work but I always think I have to do better.” Jin Soon clearly had a difficult job. Children arrive at the daycare at 6 am and go home at 6 pm. For 12 hours a day, Director Jin is responsible to feed and look after 67 children along with her small staff. That is no small task!

We were able to spend time with the children during their snack and play time. It was a joy to watch them playing in the bright, cloudless afternoon, knowing that each

one was well taken care of by the hard-working staff. None of us wanted to say goodbye!



Children from Botan-ri Daycare in Tongchon during playtime.

Vital Ingenuity in Dokchon

To the First Steps team’s delight, a new VitaGoat was put to work in Dokchon this past September. Although the machine had arrived only several months prior, the soymilk production staff were



Workers prepare a fresh batch of nutrient-rich soymilk using the VitaGoat they received in 2019.

already experienced with the machine and had even made adjustments to improve efficiency. For example, in order to allow for a higher heat while ensuring the safety of the staff, they separated the boiler from the cooker. This would keep the heat away from the staff while allowing the boiler to reach maximum temperature. By doing so, the production speed would increase while decreasing fuel consumption.

The staff not only made improvements to the VitaGoat but also are using the leftover soy by-product, known as biji in Korean. When producing soymilk, pureed soybeans are filtered and the soy pulp, or biji, is what remains. Staff are able to dry the biji and use it as animal feed - they ensure nothing goes to waste!

“I can’t tell you how convenient this VitaGoat machine is!” said Director Ri Un-Chol. He also described the First Steps’ soybeans - which they received with the equipment back in July 2019 - as round, good quality and easy to grind. “We are so thankful you come. We now have things we’ve never had before - milk cans, VitaGoats, etc.” said the staff, gratitude radiating from their faces.

The arrival of soybeans in July was timely as the city suffered from 8 inches of hail in August, followed by a typhoon in September. In South Pyongan, their province, 17 of the 20 counties and cities sustained agricultural damage. When we visited Dokchon again in late November, we learned that the soybean harvest had been even worse than expected and we made note of the need to try to provide more support in 2020.

Gifts of Kindness



Soybeans are shipped from Canada to North Korea to make soymilk. One cup of soymilk costs just 3 cents, including shipping.

Donate \$ _____ towards soybeans.



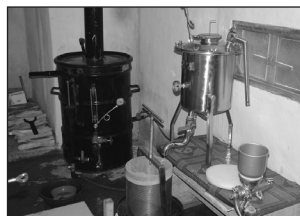
Micronutrient Sprinkles are sachets containing a blend of vitamins and minerals that are added to food. Sprinkles prevent anemia and rickets and lower the rates of diarrhea and pneumonia, the leading causes of death in children under two years of age. A \$50 donation to the Sprinkles program provides nine months of sachets for a pregnant and nursing mother and 18 months of sachets for a baby (6 to 24 months).

Donate \$ _____ towards micronutrient Sprinkles.



20-litre **stainless-steel milk cans** are vital for storing and transporting soymilk from production centres to the children we serve. They cost \$100 each.

Donate \$ _____ towards milk cans.



The **VitaGoat** is powered by *combustible fuel* (wood, coal, etc.). It processes soybeans directly into nutrient-rich soymilk and provides about 1,500 cups of soymilk per day to hungry children. The cost of a VitaGoat is \$5500.

Donate \$ _____ towards a VitaGoat.



VitaCows process soybeans directly into soymilk providing children with a warm and protein-rich drink. The VitaCow is powered by *electricity* and can produce 2000 cups of soymilk per day to feed hungry children. The cost of a VitaCow is \$7000.

Donate \$ _____ towards a VitaCow.

name _____
address _____
city _____ prov. _____ postal code _____
phone _____ email _____

Please make cheques payable to First Steps Health Society and forward to: 3260 West 5th Ave. Vancouver, B.C. V6K 1V4 Canada
BIN: 821724036 RR0001. Gifts are acknowledged with an official receipt for income tax purposes.

For further information contact us at 604.732.0195 or visit our website at www.firststepscanada.org

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