

FIRST STEPS

news

Winter 2018



Greetings!

It has been a fruitful year for First Steps. We are thankful for the many opportunities we have had to bear witness to God's faithfulness.

Reflecting on our experiences in North Korea this year brings

to mind the words of Ecclesiastes, "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven." We have seen harvests under challenging weather conditions, watched the growth of children and expectant mothers as they have received nutritious soymilk and Sprinkles, and witnessed the restoration of communities like Yonsa as they recover from

flooding. We have witnessed the results of generous gifts from you, our faithful supporters. We have seen answers to prayers.

In 2018 First Steps teams visited our partners and beneficiaries in North Korea four times to confirm the arrival and distribution of soybeans and micronutrient Sprinkles. This means that tens of thousands of pregnant women and babies are receiving the nutritional building blocks they need to grow healthy and strong and more than 100,000 children are receiving a daily cup of soymilk.

First Steps now works in nine communities, and it is exciting to see how our partnerships continue to grow and develop. In Yonsa we've witnessed its ongoing reconstruction.

It is inspiring to see the resilience of both the land and the people as they continue to recover from the flood. They are prioritizing the production of soymilk in the rebuilding of their community; they see the importance of this resource to children and families.

We are grateful for a new partnership in Pochon. This remote, mountainous community faces many challenges, and soymilk and Sprinkles have made an enormous difference in the lives of children. Children who were previously malnourished are now beginning to thrive and fewer children are becoming malnourished.

As we see our partners working hard through each season we are drawn to hope for other changes. We sense a spiritual hunger even in quiet conversations and the willing assistance

we find. We yearn for a new season of spiritual harvest. For a season of God revealing himself through Jesus Christ, the saviour of the world, because we know that whoever

drinks the water He gives will never thirst.

Thank you for your continued support. Thanks be to God for His faithfulness to us in every season.

Susan Ritchie
Executive Director



"For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven."

Ecclesiastes 3:1

Three VitaGoats, 200 metric tonnes of Canadian soybeans and 14 million sachets of Sprinkles were delivered this year!

The Hills Are Alive



Mrs. Han Hwa-Sun is happy to have a new VitaGoat machine.

In Pochon, we met with the cheerful and confident Mrs. Han Hwa-Sun, the local granary official of the soymilk factory. She enthusiastically conveyed her gratitude for First Steps soybeans and explained how they made such a difference in this community.

Each winter, heavy frost damages plants and makes it hard for soybeans

to grow. Mrs. Han told us, “If you hadn’t sent those beans we would have had a hard time, and we wouldn’t have been able to provide soymilk to the children. Please thank your donors on our behalf. We told all our teachers that it’s not out of riches that you give; it is out of the kindness of your hearts.”

Our team also visited the Pochon Daycare, which is situated in the centre of the village and looks after 43 children ages three to five. The director, Choe Chun-A, told us that since receiving soymilk, “the children’s attendance has gone up and nutrition has improved.” She specifically wanted us to meet four-year-old Hong Rim-Un.

Director Choe told us that Rim-Un had been “really weak, but has gained a bit of weight since having soymilk.”

While walking through the village, we peeked into gardens where squash, peppers and beans were growing – quite a different view compared to our visit three short months before, when the landscape was monochrome and the fields bare.



Little Rim-Un from the Pochon daycare is getting healthier thanks to daily cups of soymilk.

Hope in a Harsh Winter

During our visit in August, we provided Hyesan with a new VitaGoat soymilk processing machine, which replaced the equipment they had been using for 17 years! The energy efficient machine operates on combustible fuel so they are no longer reliant on the erratic local electricity supply.

Hyesan is located in the mountainous Ryanggang province where the summers are short. The people of Hyesan make the most of this season, but it is difficult to grow almost anything. The last frost can be as late as May and the first crops don’t go into the ground until the beginning of June. Winter comes as early as September

or October and temperatures can drop to -38 degrees Celsius!

These adverse growing conditions make it difficult for our partners at the Chongbong Foodstuff Factory to procure enough soybeans locally to supply soymilk to the children. Thanks to your support, this factory has been receiving Canadian soybeans to supplement their local supply.

Needless to say, Factory Manager Kim Yong-Ae and her staff were excited to see our team and the VitaGoat. In spite of the challenges, she and her team work tirelessly





Happy Surprise in Yonsa

The morning the First Steps team was to visit Yonsa was full of challenges. The bus that our team had used the day before broke down and we couldn't get another vehicle. That's when our dear partners in Yonsa offered to come to the rescue, driving more than 16 hours to pick up and return the team. What a blessing to arrive in Yonsa later that afternoon.

Our first stop was the Yonsa Storehouse, where we saw their VitaGoat in full operation. The VitaGoat arrived in May and was put to work in this temporary location, producing soymilk for 2,346 children. They had also recently received a shipment of First Steps soybeans and their smiles said it all. But the biggest blessing for us was still to come.

The local officials and workers beamed as they showed us the building site for their new soymilk

production facility, right in the middle of town! They explained that this new building was meant to honour First Steps and the new VitaGoat. Even though much of the industry in Yonsa has yet to be revived following the flood, they are so grateful for the VitaGoat that they have prioritized the building of this facility. Truly, this new site is the work of a whole community banding together to face their challenges.

We also visited a local hospital. There, the doctors told us that Sprinkles are given to women as soon as they register their pregnancy. Babies receive Sprinkles from ages six to 24 months. The team gave them more informational brochures to distribute to the local women. The director told us, "Next time you come, no matter which Ri [district] you go to, the brochures will be there!"



Local Yonsa official Kim Kyong-Chol is all smiles with a bag of First Steps soybeans.

to ensure soymilk is supplied to 6,000 local children in daycares, kindergartens and orphanages. They work through the night, starting at 11 p.m. in order to make enough soymilk for the children by morning.

Mrs. Kim said to us, "We live at a very high altitude and the children expend a lot of energy in the winter because it's cold." She told us to tell our supporters how grateful they are that people are helping the children.



Susan Ritchie with Mrs. Kim Yong-Ae at the Chongbong Foodstuff Factory.



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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