

PETER KLINCK

WHETHER CULTIVATING seeds in war-torn nations or reaping the harvest on his own Vermont farm, **PETER KLINCK**, a '90 agronomy alumnus, has spent a lifetime committed to restoring and strengthening the integrity of local agriculture.

The Norwich, Vermont native began his humanitarian journey by volunteering for the United States Peace Corps in 1984.

His first assignment was an agricultural development project in Niger, where Klinck collaborated with the country's ministry of agriculture in one of their five seed multiplication centers, giving technical advice on a project designed by MSU. It was there that he crossed paths with Drs. James C. "Curt" Delouche and Warren Couvillion, former professors of seed technology and agricultural economics, respectively, working as consultants on the national cereal seed program. They encouraged Klinck to look into a master's program studying seed technology at Mississippi State.

After serving in the Peace Corps, Klinck took their advice and went on to earn a master's degree in agronomy focusing on seed technology from MSU.

By 1994, Klinck had returned to international humanitarian efforts in war-torn countries. He spent two years partnering with various non-governmental agencies working towards food sustainability in Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, and Tanzania, before being recruited by the International Committee of the Red Cross for his seed technology background. He was sent to Sierra Leone to aid in the local seed procurement and distribution program.

"Other delegate agronomists employed by the Red Cross may not have seed technology training and often end up with seed varieties whose microecology doesn't always correspond to the targeted climate zone, resulting in poor harvests. The seed technology degree I earned from MSU allowed me to create onsite quality control seed selection and processing programs, and reintroduce locally-obtained cereal



Peter walking with his field officers, Mamadou and Edgar Mena, also with the Red Cross, to meet village elders to discuss agriculture assistance in the Paoua region of the Central African Republic in 2009. (photo submitted)

crops that rebuild the biodiversity toward pre-war levels," Klinck said.

Klinck explained that the Red Cross—the first international humanitarian agency established in the world—is present in any given conflict zone to protect and assist victims of armed conflict while remaining impartial, politically neutral, and independent. Over the course of his 16 years as a dedicated ICRC seed technologist, Klinck made an impact on twelve countries and territories, where he honed the practice of seed distribution.

In Sierra Leone, his team distributed 1,200 metric tons of rice seed varieties to 40,000 households on two separate occasions. What made the endeavor so special was that the rice seed distributed were local varieties that Klinck had specifically procured from adjacent communities and quality-tested to ensure that they could be sustainably farmed in the future.

"The effort to reinstate the local biodiversity of crop species is important not only ecologically but also from a food sustainability standpoint. The varieties that grow native or were developed over generations on the land are those with which local farmers have the most knowledge and experience. Providing a high-quality variety means the communities are more able to continue cultivating in the future," Klinck said.

Klinck also invested his efforts in

the former Soviet Union Republics of Georgia, Abkhazia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, where the seed program he developed in Sierra Leone was again employed. Each country he visited saw Klinck investing in the economy and the community, which in turn, allowed their populations to gain back some purchasing power and reestablish the produce marketing structure.

Though Klinck has since retired from the International Committee of the Red Cross, his dedication both to local ecology and food sustainability has remained steadfast. He now owns and operates a 77-acre farmstead in Tunbridge, Vermont, where he maintains nearly 150 wild apple trees used for sweet cider and sparkling cider wine. He also participates in the current land use forest management program through the state of Vermont, where he manages the forests on his property following a local forester's consultant plan for species management and production, which includes wildlife habitat, wetland protection, and clean water.

"My plan, specifically, is for the management of hardwoods, which are important to the economy and ecology. It's a gradual plan over time, but hopefully one that can make a lasting impact for future harvests of mature timber," Klinck said. "It's not a big-business farm, but it's as sustainable or self-sufficient as one could hope." 🐾