

Farmer tells about volunteer trip to Tanzania

By *Dean Wheeler*

SPECIAL TO THE ENTERPRISE

Each year I accept one or two assignments as a volunteer consultant in some form of agriculture or agriculturally related need in a developing country.

This program, underwritten by the U.S. Agency for International Development, is called Farmer to Farmer, and is administered by a number of nongovernmental organizations.

My administering organization was Citizens Network for Foreign Affairs, based in Washington, D.C. The USAID funds are used to pay for air fares, lodging and meals for the volunteers.

Over the years, these assignments have taken me to Brazil, Bolivia, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Uganda and Armenia. I have pleasant memories of these countries, and the help I was able to give to people who also became good friends.

This year I had the pleasure of serving for three weeks in central Tanzania, where I was asked to recommend improvements to a Tanzanian-owned juice processing plant. The location is in Morogoro, 150 miles west of the coastal city of Dar es Salaam. Morogoro is a medium-sized city of about 250,000 people.

The major revenue-earners of the area are the fiber crop sisal, citrus, tropical fruits such as pineapple, and subsistence farming. The vast majority of the crops

come from family farms of 1 to 10 acres.

CNFA employs two Tanzanians to administer this program in their country: the director, Kibibi Jabir Mtenga, and the coordinator, Anthony Kissinga. Both were extremely helpful, and we became good friends as well as teammates in our work.

The juice processing plant, known as UNNAT, purchases pineapples and oranges from these small farmers. These products then are processed into juice or juice concentrate for the Tanzanian and regional markets.

There are plans to add tomato and tangerine products in the near future. The plant can process 100 to 200 tons of raw product per day with the equipment purchased from Italy in 2006. One of the greatest challenges was to obtain more raw product, in order to keep the plant operating at capacity.

The setting of the processing plant is beautiful. About 10 miles out of town, on slightly rolling terrain, the backdrop is the Uliguru hills, which are steep and dramatic. While I did not hike in these hills, I understand this is a pleasant way to spend a day, and that some wild animals can be spotted.

One day was spent visiting the farms where pineapples and oranges are grown. It is common to see pineapple plants, orange trees, corn, beans, rice, cassava and

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much more interplanted on the same land.

When compared to our large fields of corn, alfalfa, grapes, almonds, etc., here in Yolo County, this is definitely a different way to farm. Due to these small sizes and a decided lack of capital for fertilizers or other inputs, most farm families earn very little from their agrarian enterprises, but they do eat well.

During my stay in Morogoro, it was a pleasure to become acquainted with the managers and employees of the plant. Everyone was interested in learning more about juice processing and how best to improve on the good start already made on processing techniques. I was able to provide advice on how to improve the plant's operation, and, more important, the need to purchase fruit that is more mature, to attain better quality products.

There were opportunities for

seeing Tanzania on my days off, including a visit to Mikumi National Park, near Morogoro. Although I had lived in Kenya for many years, seeing elephants, Cape buffalo, giraffes, and many other wild African animals was still a thrill. The day was even more special in that I was accompanied by Anthony Kissinga, my collaborator on my assignment, and by now a good friend.

One other day was spent visiting the island of Zanzibar, a part of Tanzania, off the coast of Dar es Salaam, and a 2½-hour boat ride from Dar. The chance to see this ancient Arab community, including its spice gardens just out of town, is the realization of a dream dating back to my time in Kenya in the '60s and '70s.

I look forward to other opportunities to serve as a Farmer to Farmer volunteer.

— *Dean Wheeler was an agricultural student at UC Davis in the 1950s. He then worked for Del Monte in Hawaii, learning to grow pineapple. This experience took him to Kenya, Philippines, Costa Rica, and then the head office in Miami, Fla. In 1992 he left Del Monte and started his own consulting practice. He moved to Davis in 2001, where he continues with consulting, including several volunteer assignments. He also is a volunteer Spanish language translator at Peterson Clinic in Woodland, and a docent at the UC Davis Arboretum.*