



Christian Friends of Korea

May 2003

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. II Corinthians 1:3-4

Corn Seed Delegation Visits Ryanggang Province

It took four days of hard driving through rugged mountains, snow, and high passes just to get there. The destination was two research centers in Ryanggang Province and the purpose of our team's long journey there was to assess the need for a special kind of corn seed requested by the North Koreans to help address the more desperate food needs of this region.

The full story surrounding this journey is still unfolding and really begins at different times, in different places, and with different people, but already God's providence can be seen throughout. The seemingly disparate partners include several North Korean officials dedicated to helping many suffering from hunger in a remote area of their country; Dave Christensen, a Montana hide tanner and corn breeder with a vision to save the disappearing stress-hardy native corn genetics; Johnny's Selected Seeds and Osborne Seed Company, two businesses willing to help in ways they could; and Christian Friends of Korea, seeking to respond to the needs of the people of North Korea in the name of Christ.



Team at a Painted Mountain Corn test plot in Ryanggang Province

Some five or more years ago in a visit to the US, a North Korean agricultural delegation received some sample seeds of Dave Christensen's Painted Mountain Corn. This corn, bred from a combination of over 60 strains of Native Indian heirloom corn, was developed over the years to produce in high elevations, in poor soil and short growing conditions, and with little water or fertilizer. The seeds were taken back to North Korea for testing where they produced good yields even in areas where other corn would not grow.

Nearly three years ago, we received a specific request from our North Korean friends for 50 pounds of Painted Mountain Corn to expand its testing. It was shipped in a container in January 2001, and last Fall we were advised of its success in the high mountain regions and were urged to provide 2 Metric Tons of this corn seed as soon as possible.

Having only purchased a small amount of the seed, we had much to learn about Painted Mountain Corn. While it is a soft corn and easily digestible with little cooking, in this country it is used primarily for ornamental purposes so 2 Metric Tons (4,400 Pounds) of seed simply did not exist. We worked very hard to find what was available, and finally were also able to directly connect with Dave Christensen. In January we shipped 530 pounds of Painted Mountain Corn, along with 770 pounds of another variety of corn donated by Johnny's Selected Seeds. We also learned that in order to provide the full 2 Metric Tons requested, a financial commitment of about \$60,000 would be required to have the seed hand grown, harvested and shipped this summer. With this level of investment, we wanted to visit the area with agricultural experts (including Dave Christensen) to verify independently that the seed was an appropriate match to the need.

What our team found on the visit was really quite overwhelming, far exceeding our expectations. While spectacularly beautiful, Ryanggang Province is very rugged and remote. The landscape of Ryanggang is dominated by the vast Paekmu Plateau that averages 4,000 feet in elevation, and is ringed by sharp mountains that soar as high as 9,000 feet above it. Home 700,000 plus, Ryangyang's people are desperately trying to grow enough food to sustain their families in this harsh environment. During the drive to and from the area (from Pyongyang, through Wonsan, Hamhung, Tanchon, Chongjin, Musan, Hyesan, Samsu and back out again the same way – with many places still covered in snow), the team traveled through dense mountain terrain. Large agricultural patches were scratched out of many steep mountain slopes - evidence of desperate people trying to use any possible space to grow things, regardless of efficiency (foreign staff who visit the area call them “wall-hanging gardens” describing the steepness of the slopes). This is the hardest hit province in terms of food need. The most recent nutritional survey of children under 2 years of age in this province (completed Fall 2002) showed that 46% were stunted, 26% were underweight, and 10% showed signs of wasting.

Our team of three visited two research stations and also held discussions with representatives from a collective farm; all had grown this corn seed. They learned that **Painted Mountain Corn produced up to 5.6 times as much corn as their local corn produced last year. It even produced well at elevations much higher than where their own corn seed will even grow.** It has a higher protein level (13%) than most US commercial corn (8%) and is a soft starch corn making it easy to grind, cook and eat. A non-hybrid, genetically-diverse corn, it can adapt quickly to local conditions. By saving 10% of their harvest each year, they will be able to plant this seed year after year. **If we can send 2 metric tons of this corn seed as requested, instead of just feeding them once, we will be providing the means for them to feed themselves for years to come.** At the highest site where the seed was grown (4,000' elevation), local officials told us,



Wall-hanging gardens

“Wheat is difficult to grow here, and barley only produces 12 bushels per acre. It is a discouraging return for our labor, hardly worth the effort. Your corn produces three times as much food for us! You have developed a crop that makes our land productive. Your corn was made for us! We are the people for your corn. We are so happy to have your corn!”

In addition to the corn seed, the team also brought samples of peas and other legumes developed to survive the cold climate, providing a necessary high protein nutritional complement to the corn while naturally putting nitrogen back into eroded soil. Discussions were held with the central authorities in Pyongyang concerning a multitude of technical issues,



Painted Mountain Corn

and they also urged us to provide 2 MT of the seed as soon as possible. Our North Korean friends told Dave and the team, *“In those areas where they cannot grow corn, Painted Mountain can be grown dependably where others will not work. I must make sure you know how happy and excited we are that you sent your wonderful corn to us! It grows here, where no other corn ever has! I know that you love it and it is your children, but it belongs here. This is the place your corn was made for. You have given our people a wonderful gift! We thank you and are so grateful!”*

We ask for your support to send 2 metric tons of urgently needed corn seed to the people of Ryangyang Province.

Confirming Delegation Travels South

While the corn team was traveling North to Ryanggang Province, four other members of the CFK team traveled South to our usual area (North and South Hwanghae Province and Kaesong) to confirm the arrival and distribution of 7 shipments sent over the previous months. During our travels South, we visited all three tuberculosis hospitals, the Kaesong Provincial Pediatric Hospital, a rest home, the TB sections of two county hospitals, and also attended church and participated in various meetings and visits in Pyongyang.



Confirming delegation at the Bongsu Church

Shipments sent over the previous months included 500 mattresses and bedding sets, hundreds of blankets, new greenhouse plastic, water project supplies and equipment, canned chicken, and various general medicines and supplies. We also hand carried with us 70 doctor's kits which were distributed to the facilities along the way.

In each place, our team's senior member delivered the donor list and shared in Korean with those present that each name on the list represents a person, church or organization who prays for them and loves them. He went on to say that our donors do this because they love Korea and her people, and try to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, wishing to share His love for them. We were warmly received at each place, had our usual discussions with the staff along with visits to the various departments to see our deliveries and equipment sent previously, and were graciously thanked for the help made possible through your generosity.



Delivering the donor list

Overall, it was a difficult time to travel, partly due to the war in Iraq that had started just prior to our departure, partly due to the growing concerns about SARS, but also as a result of the heightened political tension between North Korea and her neighbors, including the US. We were very grateful that our visas were approved in spite of all this, and for all we were able to accomplish during the visit.

While things appeared to be a little better in some small ways than they were several years ago at the height of the famine, the hardships grind on, food continues to be inadequate, energy is very scarce, and the medical system continues to have overwhelming needs. (Even in Pyongyang, they expressed to us a great need for such basic things as doctor's kits.) Our relationships grow stronger with each visit, and the appreciation we are shown is genuine and heartwarming. Their own words say it best, and it is a privilege to share some of them here with you:

"We've waited a long time to see you again."
(County Hospital Director)

"The gastroscopes you supplied have all been used constantly since we received them. Each is used for stomach procedures on about 30 patients per day. You don't know how incredibly useful the equipment you have provided has been." (Pyongyang Medical University Teaching Hospital)



Tuberculosis Hospital Staff

“In our nation, children are kings, so we are treating and you are helping us to treat kings. Thank you and please express our thanks to all those who have helped.” (Kaesong Provincial Pediatric Hospital)

“These doctor’s kits which you supply contain basic tools that our doctors need every day - but which they don’t have, and which no other NGO is providing. It is wonderful that you provide us with a few each time you come, but couldn’t you please bring more?” (Mangyongdae County People’s Hospital)

“The hospitals are getting better thanks to Christian Friends of Korea.” (Tuberculosis Hospital Director)



A young tuberculosis patient

“Painted Mountain Corn seed will contribute a lot to resolving the very serious food problem in the northern part of our country. Your assistance with medicine, equipment and agriculture is an encouragement to us. We appreciate your efforts and we will remember what you have done for us during our difficult period.” (Senior Government Official in Pyongyang)

Thank you for joining with us through your continued prayers and support for this work in North Korea. Our opportunities to serve and bring healing in Christ’s name continue to widen despite the present political uncertainties, and we covet your prayers and your generous financial support as we try to respond to the needs presented to us. While the North Koreans have very recently raised new travel restrictions due to the SARS outbreak, in the coming months we look forward to finishing the installation of the water distribution system at Sariwon and continuing to assist the tuberculosis, pediatric and other medical facilities we serve. We are also hoping to send the requested Painted Mountain corn seed as God provides the resources through his faithful people.

The compassion that we share with the people of North Korea is a gift that we pass on having first received it ourselves by grace from God. While it may be too soon to expect such understanding from those we minister among in North Korea, it is interesting to note that their own leadership is quoted in *Reminiscences*, “...we have the saying: an evil spirit cannot resist ritual prayers, a human being cannot resist compassion.”

Christian Friends of Korea

Christian Friends of Korea is a tax-exempt, non-profit organization founded in 1995 to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ through humanitarian, educational, and religious programs. Contributions to CFK are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. CFK also accepts stock or in-kind donations. Please make all checks payable to “Christian Friends of Korea.”

If you are interested in supporting the work of CFK or to request information or materials, please contact us.

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