



**WINROCK**  
INTERNATIONAL

## Making a Difference in Rural Arkansas

Winrock International

Improving Lives and Livelihoods Worldwide



With Winrock's assistance, Harvey (pictured in the center) along with other 20 local farmers, was able to secure additional income by switching to growing sweet potatoes, a higher yielding crop.

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[Winrock’s]  
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**- Harvey  
Williams**

Harvey Williams was in trouble. The Arkansas farmer had just been reading the Sunday paper and had seen the price of soybeans for the next year - \$4.18 a bushel! Only three years ago, the price was over \$7.00 a bushel. He did a quick calculation and realized at \$4.18 a bushel it was likely he would actually lose money on his fall crop. As he and Mary, his wife of nearly 40 years, traveled to the Sunday morning services at the New Light Missionary Baptist Church, he continued to worry about how he could continue to make a living on his family farm operation. It was a hard living, but so rewarding. And he really hoped that eventually one of his three sons would take over the operation. “Harvey, Jr.,” he thought. “I’ve got to keep things going so he can be the 5<sup>th</sup> generation farmer on this land.”

Arriving at the church, he saw an old

friend, Beatrice Shelby-Clarke. “Miss Bea,” as everyone called her, looked jaunty in her Sunday outfit. Harvey and Mary approached her, and Harvey asked if she was doing okay. “Oh, yes, Harvey,” she said, “I’ve just got some new equipment for our day-care restaurant, and I’m so pleased. We will be able to serve at least 20 more children!” “How were you able to swing that?” asked Harvey. “Well, you know, it was those Winrock people over in Little Rock,” replied Miss Bea. “They hooked us up with some folks that were replacing some of their restaurant equipment, and next thing I knew, they were delivering a commercial-grade mixer, some benches and tables, and a refrigerator to the restaurant! The equipment is used, but just like brand-new to us!”

During the sermon, Harvey’s thoughts kept going back to the conversation with Miss Bea. He had heard about Winrock—they were the ones who had helped Miss Bea get a grant for her day-care facility. And now they had helped her get equipment! “I’ll call them first thing tomorrow,” he mused.

After the church service, he talked more with Miss Bea and got a name and phone number of her contact at Winrock. The next day, he called Annett Pagan, US Programs Director at Winrock International. “Miss Pagan,” he said, “I’ve got an idea for a project, but I don’t know how I can get it going.” After a lengthy conversation with Annett, he hung up the phone. “I know it’s a long shot,” thought Harvey. “We’ve always raised soybeans! But I’ve heard great things about sweet potatoes –

how they grow so well just across the river, how those guys are making huge profits! Maybe we **can** do this thing. I just need to get a little help up front, to get that storage facility built.”

A few days passed, and Harvey thought he might not hear from Winrock again. But, the next week, the call came. “We’d like to set up a meeting,” said Annett Pagan. “We think you’ve got a great project, and we want to help you get it off the ground and running. Earlier this week, we had a conversation with Gerber Foods in Fort Smith. They say they are very interested in buying your product.”

The next week, at Annett’s request, Harvey assembled 20 local farmers to meet with staff from Winrock International. Annett and her staff explained the project: Instead of raising soybeans, the farmers would raise sweet potatoes, a much more profitable crop. In order to have the quantity of potatoes needed for large buyers like Gerber Foods, they would have to build a storage facility. “We will help you organize the farmers to grow the quantity and quality of potatoes needed, and introduce you to people who can help you get funding for the storage facility,” said Annett. “We will also help you find markets for all your sweet potatoes!” “This is too good to be true,” thought Harvey, looking around at the group of farmers, which included friends he had known all of his life. “Finally I may be a part of something that will help us all!”

With help from Annett and her staff, they developed a plan. The first thing to do was organize the farmers. A Limited Liability Corporation (LLC) was formed, including Harvey and four other dedicated farmers. Annett brought in consultants who in-

structed the farmers how to grow the best sweet potatoes, to talk about storage needs, and how to meet the supply demands of the buyers. Another consultant developed a business plan. “A business plan is essential to find funding for the storage facility,” said Annett. “You can’t get outside support without a good business plan.”

The first planting season, Harvey and his friends planted 200 acres of sweet potatoes. By harvest time, the business plan had been completed, but funding for the storage facility had not been secured. The farmers attended two major food trade shows and got contracts with buyers who were very interested in buying Arkansas sweet potatoes. That year, the farmers rented storage space and sold their potatoes to those buyers. They had mixed success—many potatoes rotted and did not make it through the winter. “We really need that storage facility with a controlled environment,” said Harvey. “It will help us all, but most importantly, it will bring my idea to a reality.”

Annett and her associates stepped up their efforts to secure funding and build the facility and were able to complete the first phase before the next harvest season. That second year, Harvey and the other farmers had a “bumper” crop of sweet potatoes. More than 400 acres had been planted, and the storage facility was filled to the brim. All through the winter and into the spring, potatoes were packed out to buyers in Texas, Arkansas, and Illinois. “We owe our success to Winrock International,” said Harvey. “Without their help, I’d still be struggling with how to get my idea from a thought to reality. Winrock International can truly make a difference.”

Winrock International is a nonprofit organization that works with people in the United States and around the world to empower the disadvantaged, increase economic opportunity, and sustain natural resources.



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