



Eric and Sandra Read

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Contact details:
esread@smallburn.co.uk



Location: Philippines



What we do: Demonstrating natural farming models alongside equipping churches in holistic mission for real community impact.

Dear friends,

On our last visit with you we shared about how Eric has started to shift the farm to syntropic planting, which is a form of regenerative agroforestry. Our aim in doing this is not just for the benefit of the farm, but as a trial and demonstration which we want to promote to the departments of agriculture and environmental resources and to other farmers. We want to show that it is both highly productive and regenerates the soil and environment, leaving it better for future generations, and that the increase in soil organic matter helps to counter climate change. God in his infinite wisdom created a built-in capacity for nature to regenerate but has given man the responsibility to enhance and develop it, like Adam's role in the Garden of Eden.

After watching some videos on YouTube, Eric could see he was making many mistakes (making a complete pig's ear of it!) and needed to learn a lot more. So Eric has signed up for online training in syntropic farming run by an Australian farmer. He is learning a lot and starting to put the mistakes right, although it is taking time and is not helped by the excessive rains we are getting, frequently delaying work.

Syntropic farming involves planting and sowing lines of trees – a mixture of fruit trees and others, which are pruned regularly to provide plenty of biomass to mulch the line. The pruning also causes the trees to release growth hormones, which also benefit other plants, boosting the growth rate of the whole system. Any and every sort of tree is sown so there are fast growing, slow growing, tall and short – like in a natural forest. Fast growing bulky grasses are also grown between the lines for cutting and adding to the lines. With minimal disturbance to the ground, the soil fauna and microbes also dramatically increase with symbiosis between them and the plants each benefiting from each other. With sufficient biomass, vegetables can also be grown in the middle of the grassy area between the tree lines. We are experimenting with eggplant (aubergine) but are a bit short on the biomass, so that means more weeding unfortunately.

At the moment we only have a small area being converted to syntropic while we learn. We also grow about three acres of maize, for now conventionally but we are beginning to trial doing this regeneratively too, with



Guava, rambutan, more guava, banana, cacao, more banana and jackfruit, and some biomass trees (and some gaps) all growing in a few metres, with aubergine.

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With each other
To the edges**



no tillage. Maize is one of the main crops around us, all grown conventionally but becoming increasingly difficult for farmers to grow due to high costs and labour shortages. This year quite a bit of land has not been cropped simply because of the lack of labour. A system requiring less labour is going to be attractive to farmers. Please pray we will be able to develop a system that works.

We came back in the second week of May. After five months, our home leave in England is now a distant memory as we shift back to a different life here. Feels like so many things have happened and yet we have not gone much forward. Peter, our now former CMS regional manager, came for a visit in June. Together we reflected on where we are in our ministry and how to move forward. The limited successes and many setbacks and failures we've had over the years have weakened our confidence and faith in moving forward. However, we were reminded in the sermon last Sunday that David Livingstone had only one convert from all his years in Africa. No doubt he felt discouraged at times too. But that one convert went on to convert his village and... Maybe we sometimes get too hung up on achievements rather than on faithfulness and obedience. Please pray that we will be faithful – and we would like to see some success too! While Peter was here we also met with a couple of similar-minded organisations in Manila with whom we hope to be able to develop closer relations in due course.

Atiyah joined us for a month during her summer break and then after returning to Reading had an operation to repair her knee from a football injury earlier in the year. It is slowly healing now, but she still can't walk very far and unfortunately her moped was stolen the day after her operation so her mobility is rather restricted. However, she is still active in the football club – just not with her feet! Her studies are keeping her pretty busy at the moment too.

Our son Peter, using the money he saved working when we were back, has set himself up a mobile cocktail bar with a couple of friends. He was very keen to do it and worked very hard on it so we said he could take a year out from his studies and see how he gets on. They have set up in Siargao, a surfing island off the east coast and a popular tourist location. Business has been up and down, but they seem to be making slow progress – it has managed to keep them housed and fed! We went to see him last week and were impressed with how they seem to be carving themselves out a niche and getting known on the island.

We are looking forward to them both joining us for Christmas.

Our grateful thank you to you all for your continued support for and interest in us and our work, and blessings to you all.

Eric & Sandra



Photos from top to bottom: Drastic pruning of the biomass and placing it along the tree lines; We had a small celebration in the Bible study group to celebrate all the youngsters graduating to the next class; With manager Peter we were able to visit Nady, one of our close friends and advisors.



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