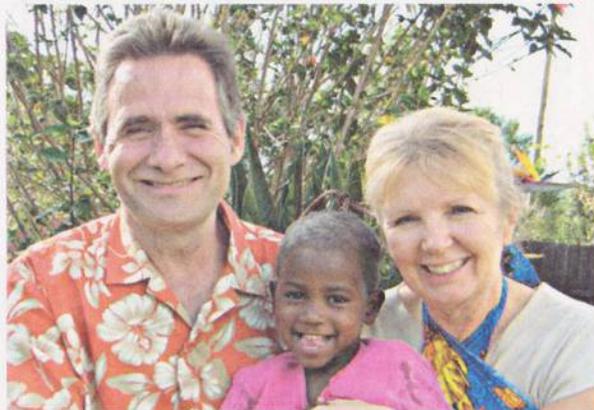


Planting the seeds of sustainable development

Local couple hopes organic gardens will help combat hunger and disease in Africa and beyond by Michelle Ervin



Dale and Linda Bolton are the founders of Organics 4 Orphans

Dale Bolton could hardly believe it when he heard it: 30 to 40 million children had been orphaned by the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Africa. Then, in 2004, he travelled to the continent with his wife, Linda.

"We went to Malawi and saw first-hand how many unsupported kids there were," he says.

Linda was heartbroken by it, he says, and he felt compelled to do something. They returned to help, building schools and orphanages.

But it soon became clear that the real struggle was to feed all the children. Due to the high cost of chemical fertilizer, most of the food was being imported rather than grown locally.

"The kids were eating the most disgusting food because that's all they could afford," Dale says.

After coming across two local schools, one teaching organic agriculture and the other natural medicine, Dale came up with a unique idea. He and his wife founded Organics 4 Orphans, a non-profit that combines organic farming and nutritional education to combat hunger and disease in Africa. By focusing on immune system-strengthening foods, the hope is to reduce illness.

For less than \$500 a year, the couple can equip communities with the tools and knowledge to grow their own gardens and feed themselves. The small sum covers the cost of hiring a local instructor, who will return to the community 10 times in the first year, as well as start-up supplies.

"That will get them going: where they can start making their own fertilizer, making their own pesticides, saving their own seeds," he says.

Linda and their friends have

funded the first 120 projects. But demand for help is even greater. They're currently setting up their website so that donors can fund individual projects and follow their progress. The goal is to reach the world's 50 poorest countries.

To move toward this target, Organics 4 Orphans is starting a 12-week travelling school that will pass through Kenya, Tanzania and

"They've given me energy to want to do this all over the world."

Ethiopia starting this April.

Dale says the plan is to spread the concept by educating locals in different countries, who can then pass on what they've learned. After

funding the communities for four years, they should be able to continue to grow enough food to feed themselves and to sell, he says.

Dale and Linda travel to Africa a few times a year, to check in on the communities reached by Organics 4 Orphans. He recalls a woman in her fifties, whom he visited eight months after she attended the school. She was growing enough food on her small plot to feed her five grandchildren and a handful of others as well. She was also able to afford her first-ever mattress.

"It's the coolest thing — we're actually seeing a dignity in the midst of poverty," he says.

Dale plans to continue the work he's doing now for years to come.

"I don't actually think I'm giving the African kids anything," he says. "They've made me into a kid again. They've given me energy to want to do this all over the world."

The Post salutes Dale and Linda Bolton for their commitment to creating lasting change in some of the world's poorest countries.