

## PRAYER UPDATE, OCTOBER 2020

### HIGHS AND LOWS OF MISSIONAL BUSINESS

Hi Friends,

My day started today at 4:00am in Bucharest (9:00pm EST). Now I am on the airplane from Frankfurt to Newark, after 17 days in Romania, 14 of which were required quarantine. The Boing 787-10 is at less than 20% capacity due to the global pandemic. European countries are shutting down daily. When I arrived in Bucharest yesterday, I received a text message on my phone that all restaurants and other social gathering places are closed for the next 14 days. As best I can tell, any travel between the European union countries requires 14 days of quarantine. I am glad to be on my last flight. I hope I can cross from NJ to NY to get home. If all goes according to plan, I should be home in time for dinner after 21 hours of travel.

It's is funny how these trips always roll from high points of encouragement to low depths of discouragement. Let me share with you some of my highs and lows from the trip.

#### **HIGH: AFFIRMING THE VISION**

On one of my first days, I spent the morning riding an ATV around the 400 acre **Heritage Ranch** (Cattle and Chicken farm), visit-



ing sites and praying for God to be glorified in this place and through this business. I prayed for health for the animals, and safety and wisdom for our workers who are needing to learn about chicken & cattle nutrition, environment and the many things that can kill them or make them healthy. I prayed that families will be blessed as they come to the ranch and for the communities of Roma and other people around the property to see the light of Jesus through our work and ministry, and that lives will be transformed.

I felt affirmed that this land was previously consecrated by God during Soviet times as the location of His underground seminary and that we are just the next phase of ownership for this property so that He can be glorified.

I was elated to hear about the baptisms that took place this summer at two of the churches whose pastors are financially sustained via our businesses. It was a wonderful time of reflection and dreaming and praying, with a real sense of affirmation in my calling to be part of this vision and mission.

### LOW: MOTH LARVA DAMAGE

However, in the evening, following dinner and a couple zoom calls, we began to look at the numbers and performance of the **Heritage Farm** (Our vegetable operation, which is separate from the Ranch). You might recall that in 2019 we lost an entire crop of cucumbers due to “downy mildew,” which caused the cucumbers to become misshapen. We ended up donating over \$75,000 of produce to a ministry who feeds 400 people per day. Our produce was nutritious and fine for eating, but it was not pretty enough to sell in the large grocery stores. The end result was a significant financial loss on the vegetable farm in 2019. We have been tracking the vegetable operation very closely this year, with weekly financial reports and weekly calls to discuss progress.

All was going fairly well up until last night. Although we had some minor losses so far this year, our revenue was nearly doubled from 2019. A significant portion of the profit would come with the final crops to be har-



vested in October. The primary remaining crop is iceberg lettuce, which is a cool season plant. We have 100,000 iceberg lettuce plants which are to be sold this month at roughly 80 cents each.

We found out yesterday that we have a problem with a small worm (moth larva) that has gotten into the first planting (roughly 20,000 heads). Although they only effect a small piece of the plant (think large marble sized contamination on a few outer leaves) the contamination will result in the potential loss of the entire harvest since consumers do not want to buy a head of lettuce with a corner chopped out of it. We do not have a buyer who could use the lettuce for salads or Cole slaw or some other shredded purpose, so it looks like we will be donating this to the food shelter once again. While we are all happy with the ability to bring food and blessing to these people who are in great need, it likely means that the vegetable operation will for the second year in a row suffer a significant loss.



## GOD IS IN CONTROL

So, the swings from high to low are part of my day-to-day experience when I am away from home. The elation of being part of God's big plan coupled with the disappointment and discouragement and the stark reality of how hard it is to successfully build and sustain missional businesses in frontier markets.

My devotional today was regarding Martha's conversation with Jesus, following the death of her brother, Lazarus.

*"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."*

***But, I know that even now, God will give you whatever you ask."***

Martha knew the stark reality that her brother had died, but she had not lost hope. She prayed boldly. She knew that God is not only able to prevent bad things from happening, but that He is able to reverse the bad things that have already happened, or to turn them and use them for His good purpose.

## PLEASE PRAY WITH US

So, I am asking you to pray boldly with me about the vegetables on the farm. That the worms would leave our heads of lettuce, that the remaining lettuce, tomatoes, zucchini, and cucumbers would ripen quickly and look beautiful for display and sale in the grocery stores. Pray that the remaining crops can be sold so that we come close to break even for the year on the vegetable farm.

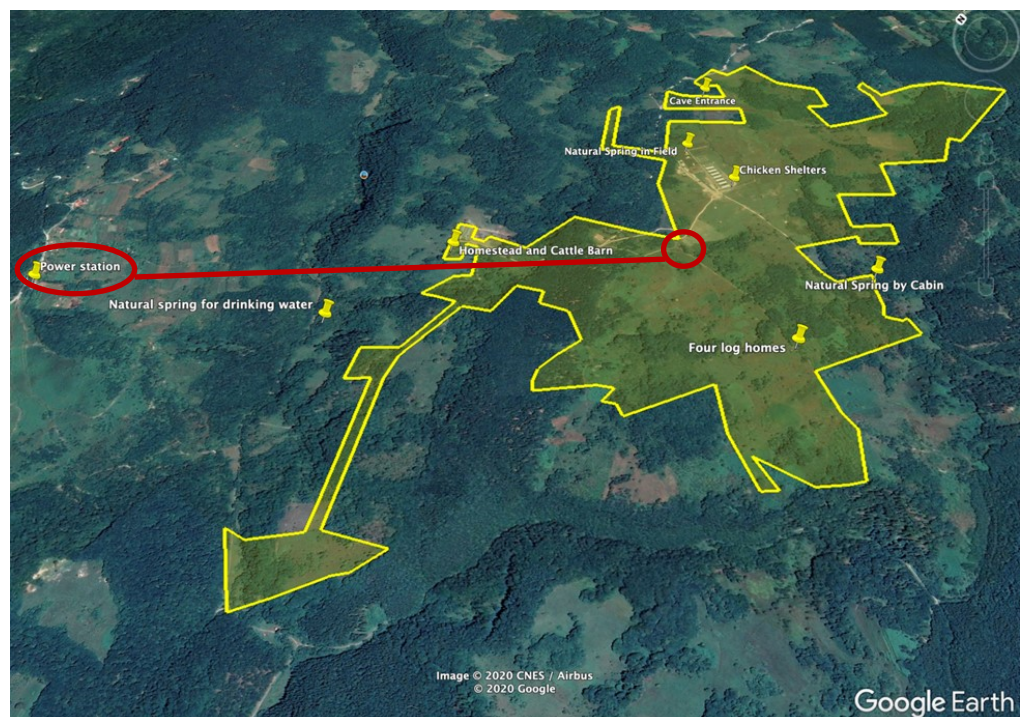
## PROGRESS: INFRASTRUCTURE

Another day started poorly, as we discussed some of our infrastructure needs at the Ranch. The Ranch is in a pretty remote area, about 10km from a small rural village. We are "off the grid" without public utilities such as water or electricity.

My colleagues have been in contact with the mayor and local officials and electric company numerous times over the past year to begin the expensive process of bringing these utilities to the Ranch. We have not had any success at moving the solution forward. It was a pretty discouraging morning.

See the map below: the red line indicates where the nearest power station is compared to where we need it on our property. It is a distance of about 1.5km. The yellow line indicates the boundaries of our property which is about 400 acres in total.

Our CEO invited an acquaintance from college to join us for lunch at the ranch and to meet us. The friend is a like-minded attorney who is passionate about his faith and seeing those who are persecuted and vulnerable such as the Roma (Gypsy) helped economi-



cally and disciplined in their faith. I was not aware until the middle of our meeting that this very nice, sharp attorney is one of Romania's delegates to the UN.

About an hour after he left us, our Executive Director received phone calls from not only the mayor of the city but also from the chief engineer at the electric company asking how they could be of help. Apparently they had each received a call from the Senator of our district (3rd down from the President) which was prompted by a phone call from our new friend who had visited with us for lunch and joined in our vision for bringing blessing to a very rural region and especially to the Roma villages that are in close proximity to our property.



The next morning I watched as they measured the recovery rate of one of the existing springs on our property. It appears that, with the proper filtration, we can use this spring to create a reservoir which will be sufficient for our chicken operation until public utilities are installed. Even with the support of high government officials, we do not expect a more permanent water system solution to come quickly because nothing happens quickly in frontier countries.

## CHICKENS

The Ranch now has 20,000 chickens that range in weight from 500 to 1500

grams. They are to be sold when they reach 2000 - 2500 grams (2.5 kg = about 5 pounds) for about \$13 per bird. That represents roughly \$260k USD in revenue for the Ranch this year.

We are working hard to complete the slaughtering/processing facility in the next two weeks so that the workers can begin to process the chickens and sales can begin. The processing facility is two months behind schedule because of government promises that have not come through, namely approval to lease land in the village with necessary infrastructure (electric, water, waste). In the absence of the approvals, we are forced to assemble the plant on our property because we have chickens that will soon be ready.

Please pray for the final details, assembly and approvals to come together regarding the processing plant. We are the first organic chicken processing facility in Romania so we are using EU standards for our facility in order to set the standards for Romania. Romania does not have any written standards for organic chicken processing yet. Please pray that our remaining birds stay healthy and continue to gain weight so that they are plump and will yield high quality meat for the consumers who will eventually eat them.



## ROMA VILLAGES

Pray for the several Roma villages surrounding the Ranch and the Farm. Pray that the churches that have been planted by our pas-



tors will thrive, that more people will come to know Jesus as their Lord and that wholistic transformation occurs in these communities. Pray that God would show us the best ways to bless these communities in the coming years (educational programs, clean water, jobs, church planting, vocational training, repaired house, improved roads and drainage, etc.).

Due to COVID-19 and the Roma villagers' refusal to abide by any of the government requirements such as masks, social distancing, etc., we were not able to visit the villages during this trip. In fact, we have not been able to start any new ministry in 2020. We provide the vocation and wages which sustains two pastors, one in each village, and we look forward to building through their relationships to meet the needs of these impoverished communities in 2021.

## THE TRUE MISSION FOR BUSINESS

I expect that some of you who are new to "Business as Mission" may be thinking, "When will these guys get to the real ministry of evangelism and discipleship?"

The answer is, we've been doing the "work" of ministry all along. As we interact with locals, we are representing Christ. We are able to hire local workers and Christ shines through as they see how we live our lives and what we make as our priorities. We are also able to fund pastors who are working directly with the Roma people.

The root of the English word vocation is the Latin verb *voca*, which means "to call." The linguistic evidence suggests that historically, people actually thought of every type of work as a "calling." Calling was not only reserved for sacred occupations such as pastor or missionary. We see in scripture two verses that echo this sentiment:

*Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.* 1 Cor. 10:31

*For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Ephesians 2:10



For a Christian, work is a calling. Whether you are a minister or a mechanic, a pastor or a pilot, a missionary or a mom, fellowship director or a farmer, you do not work just because it pays the bills, or because it's personally fulfilling, or because it's what you went to school for.

*"You should work because it glorifies God. Work is a call of God upon an individual's life. It becomes the sphere through which, not merely in which, a Christian serves Christ and His Kingdom. It is the occupation--the principle business of one's life--through which one occupies territory or a sphere of influence for Jesus Christ."*  
— Dallas Willard



Lord would continue to reveal to His clear calling to this place and this project. We are a "Business as Mission" project, which means that we seek to build good solid sustainable business which will fund decades of mission and ministry. But, as everyone knows, more than 80% of businesses fail in their first 5 years. As we grow the business, we will simultaneously seek ways that we can bring blessing to the surrounding impoverished Roma villages, including an after school program for children in 2021, if COVID-19 restrictions are lifted.

In His Service,  
Don

## HOW YOU CAN PRAY

I am sorry that this update is a bit longer than normal. There was a lot to share. I hope you found it interesting.

Please join me in fervent prayer for God to provide what is needed. Also pray that as we continue to strategize both business and ministry at the Farm and Ranch, that the

