

AFVP program kicks off in Ghana

In 2009 Lynda Swenson left her corporate banking job of over 30 years in the United States to travel to African communities as a volunteer specializing in finance.

Swenson said that it was not a difficult decision to make. She had made her contribution in the banking world and the time had come to make an even greater contribution on to the world. "I think volunteer work was something I have always wanted to do. I knew that there would come a day when I would go back and share my financial expertise with people who did not have the same privileges I had," Swenson said.

She said through her banking job there were many instances where people had good ideas, but lacked the financial expertise to make the idea's flourish.

It is for this reason that Swenson did not think twice about joining the African Fertilizer Volunteers Program (AFVP) when she first found out about it. The AFVP is a joint program between the African Fertilizer and Agribusiness Partnership (AFAP) and the International Fertilizer Industry Association (IFA) that mobilizes expertise in support of AFAP goals of increasing smallholder fertilizer users and usage, providing a mechanism in channelling targeted capacity support across the fertilizer development value chain in Africa.

Through the AFVP Swenson travelled to Nkawkaw in the eastern region of Ghana for an interactive training session for agro-dealers on agribusiness finance management with Sakant Enterprises Limited, a hub agro-dealer together with their retail distributors working around the region. The course was interactive, with morning training sessions spent in classroom style. In the afternoons visits and interactions took place with the various agro-dealers in their shops and in the Sakant warehouse. In the second week Swenson went to Techiman, Northern Ghana, where similar training was provided to Northgate Enterprises, who are also a hub agro-dealer together with their retail distributors. A total of 62 persons received training.

"I enjoyed my assignment at Sakant and Northgate. Besides the sunny skies, most of the participants were really engaged and were looking for ways to not only help their businesses, but wanted to know how they could uplift their communities in the process," Swenson said.

Both Sakant and Northgate are beneficiaries of the AFAP agribusiness partnership contract recipients, enabling them to complete warehouses that increase the supply of fertilizer to a larger network.

Kwaku Amoah-Safo (Managing Director: Sakant Enterprise Limited) said he was delighted with the training his team received from Swenson, stating that he had initially thought it would waste his time, but it ended up helping him trigger some much-needed growth in his company. "Through the training, Lynda helped us cater more for smallholder farmers, especially with crafty ways of offering credit to recurring customers and repacking fertilizers into smaller units, which reduces the prices. Amoah-Safo noted that Swenson had assisted in the management of day-to-day bookkeeping and accounting which will help their finances and auditing in the long term.

"I am not a farmer; I can't help farmers grow more or better maize, but I can help agribusinesses improve their profits and increase their cash flow from their products," Swenson said. She added that with agro-dealers she always stresses inventory (stock) and account debtors management to increase and accelerate cash flow.

“If an opportunity comes up again, I will most certainly love to join the AFVP again, but I am confident that the impact of the trainings will not require me to return to Northgate and Sakant,” Swenson said confidently.