



2017 TFG
Conference

Traditional Craft Skills & Current Agricultural Developments: A Fruitful Marriage

Jonathan Kline & Jack Gesmundo
Tillers International

Jonathan Kline and Jack Gesmundo will describe current efforts to provide training for farmers and craftsmen in the African countries where Tillers International works. They will discuss how traditional craft skills in blacksmithing and woodworking often become indispensable to accomplishing results in these settings. They will inspire you to consider a broader understanding of craftsmanship, one more inclusive than is typically encountered in most trade conversations.

Tillers International is a not-for-profit organization located in Scotts, Michigan, with a mission to preserve, study, and exchange skills and tools that empower communities worldwide to improve livelihoods and agricultural productivity. With over half of Africa's population still living an agrarian lifestyle, often on small subsistence farms of just a few acres, Tillers provides animal traction skills that are readily accessible and able to genuinely improve agricultural output. These practices seek to enhance quality of life for current and future generations with techniques that improve the fertility of the soils. Tillers shares low-capital, public domain technologies, and in particular 19th century American farming tools and techniques, because of their utility and power to produce proven results in communities with less access to material technologies and having fewer available resources. The organization strives to inspire an attitude of experimentation in both farmers and the local craftsmen who make the necessary tools, since they are most knowledgeable about local conditions, needs, and capabilities. Traditional craft skills in blacksmithing and woodworking often become indispensable to accomplish results in these settings.

About the Speakers

Jonathan Kline

Jonathan Kline is executive director of Tillers International in Scotts, Michigan. He has been working in international development for over a decade, having implemented programming throughout Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. He holds degrees in Sustainable Agriculture, International Agriculture, and Rural Development from Sterling College and Cornell University.

Jack Gesmundo

Jack Gesmundo is president of the Board of Directors of Tillers International and has served on the board for the last 16 years. He founded Hawks Hollow Builders – Custom Homes and Cabinetry in Hickory Corners, Michigan, in 1978, and in the nearly 40 years since has established a solid reputation for quality craftsmanship and innovation. Mr. Gesmundo was a board member for the Energy and Environmental Building Alliance from 1992 to 2000, serving two terms as president. He graduated from Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo in 1974 after having served in the US Marine Corps.