

Turn a Family Farm into a Profit Center

“If they can market what they grow to their neighbors and make a living doing it, they can enrich their lives and those of their neighbors.”

- John Grovin, Wisconsin family farmer

With a mix of specialty crops, livestock and some savvy-marketing, small-scale family farming can be profitable. As the population grows more urbanized, it turns out U.S. farmers are finding that city folks and their children like to come visit the farm for fun and learning.

Corporate agriculture on a vast scale has come to dominate the U.S. farming sector in recent decades, and small family-farms have had a hard time remaining competitive and profitable. By developing a new model for their farms and finding new customers, some U.S. farmers are proving their small operations can carve out a profitable niche in the marketplace.

These U.S. growers have lessons to share with their African counterparts as the latter attempt to progress beyond mere subsistence farming to become commercial enterprises.

A YALI Network member takes a turn  picking strawberries at Govin’s Meats and Berries during a 2014 visit.

Mandela Washington Fellows members saw a modern, profit-making operation made from a small farm when they visited Govins Meats and Berries in Menomonie, Wisconsin, a few months ago. Answering questions from the African visitors, owners John and Julie Govin explained how their business has evolved and how they make money.

Question: Why did you choose to be farmers?

John: I grew up a dairy farmer. Julie was a university marketing major.

Julie: I grew up in a city suburb but I knew farming was the lifestyle I wanted.

Q. How did you finance your farm?

Govins: The seller gave us good terms and our bank backed us up. We’ve expanded and borrowed along the way. We have always been able to pay back our loans. Our farm is 65 acres (26 hectares) — the right size for the two of us to handle.

Q: What do you grow?

Govins: Cattle and sheep, which we sell for meat, and chickens for meat and eggs. We have six acres [2.5 hectares] of strawberries.

Q. How does your farm make money?

Govins: Through direct sales to customers and through agrotourism. People like to know how their

food is raised and will pay to see where it comes from.

In the spring, we invite people to visit our lambing barn. City people like to see animal births. We charge a fee for visitors to watch lambs being born.

We have goats, ponies, and even alpacas, a camel-like animal from South America. Children like to pet them. We also have educational signs throughout the barn that teach people about the animals.

In late spring, people pay to pick their own baskets of strawberries straight from the field. Or they can buy already-picked fresh berries. The arrival of the strawberry crop is a big attraction. The fellows asked if we replant strawberry seeds the next season. We said that instead every year we buy strawberry tissue cultures from a certified strawberry nursery to replant.

In the fall, we cut a decorative pattern in a maize field for people to walk through (comparable to a path through a garden maze of hedges). That is another way to generate tourist income. We bought another property and decorated the barn to rent out for weddings.

Q. Where do you market your products?

Govins: We are in a good location near a major highway. We have a large sign next to the highway directing drivers to the farm. That brings in a lot of business.

We sell our meats at an open air market in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 22 miles [35 kilometers] away. More than 100,000 people live within 80 miles [129 kilometers] of our farm.

We use print flyers and social media to advertise our products. Word-of-mouth is another big promoter.

Q: How many employees do you have?

Govins: One full-time and up to 20 seasonal employees. They are all neighbors and friends.

Q: How do you keep your fields fresh?

Govins: Through crop rotation, which allows nutrients to replenish the soil. After two or three years we take the strawberries out and plant a cover crop of wheat, or pumpkins or sweet corn for a couple years. We then plant strawberries on another plot.

YALI Network members take a break 
with Jim Govin, center, rear.

Q: What is your farming method?

Govins: We are conventional farmers. Fertilizer goes on everything, and herbicides and pesticides when needed.

When they visited in summer 2014, we took the Mandela Washington Fellows to a neighbor's irrigated corn field. The corn was nine feet [2.8 meters] tall. It looked beautiful. They looked at the soil and wondered how the ground could be so clear and free of weeds. It was planted with genetically modified seed that resists weeds.

Q: What is your advice for young Africans considering farming?

Govins: If they can market what they grow to their neighbors and make a living doing it, they can enrich their lives and those of their neighbors. For many of them, that's their goal.

Identifying a competitive edge and the needs of specific customers are key strategies for African farmers who strive to expand a small farm to become a commercial enterprise. An executive at Honey Care Africa is helping East African beekeepers grow their businesses and offers a few tips on how to get there in this [blog post](#).

Growing Prosperity in African Agriculture

Hundreds of YALI Network members joined a [Facebook chat](#) about how to make farming more productive and profitable in Africa with Madison Ayer. Ayer is the chairman and chief executive officer of [Honey Care Africa](#), a successful honey production and distribution value chain. He is helping beekeepers create sustainable and productive enterprises in Kenya, South Sudan and Tanzania.

The Farm Shop gives growers reliable  access to the supplies they need to produce a crop.

Ayer's strategy for successful farming is that growers must make accurate calculations of production requirements and outputs they'll deliver at harvest. Achieving precision in tracking those accounts will allow them to evolve from smallholder enterprises to successful commercial businesses.

"Without the right seeds, fertilizers, and other tools, smallholder farmers stand little chance of producing a sufficient harvest," said Ayer. "However, with access to the right products and methods, smallholder farmers can become very successful. The farmers must view it as a real business, not just an uninspiring activity."

The perception of farming as an unappealing way to make a living is apparently hurting the advancement of agriculture in Africa. While some network members questioned the meager livings and small rewards reaped by today's African farmers, Ayer calls agriculture "an exciting and successful livelihood." He's working with African youth groups to convey that message.

"We present a modern customer experience, conduct trainings about modern methods, demonstrate new technologies, and teach about other aspects of agribusiness," Ayer said. "This is successful because it presents farming as an exciting livelihood with potential to make a good income through modern business."

Ayer discussed the future of agriculture with an engaged and informed audience. A YALI Network member identified with a livestock operation endorsed Ayer's recommendations for African farmers to rush into the future.

"It is time we embraced innovative, formal and value-adding approaches/practices if we are to think of and realize significant progress in our naturally-endowed agro advantages and prowess as a continent," wrote a YALI member associated on Facebook with ZamGoats Product Innovation.

But getting started in a productive enterprise takes money. Probably the most frequently asked question in the Facebook chat: "Where do I get the start-up capital?"

Ayer has heard that question a lot. Besides helping beekeepers get started, he also works with Farm Shop, a social enterprise devoted to helping farmers access commodities and supplies they need to increase productivity and expand their enterprises.

"You can first inquire about whether there are local government grant programs that could support your start-up," Ayer responded to the finance question. "There may also be NGOs operating in your areas that would be interested to support the start-up of your venture. Many private foundations offer grants to small organizations and are becoming increasingly interested in agribusiness as a livelihood opportunity."

Raising the money to get started is the obvious problem, but Ayer urged small farmers to pay attention to something they might overlook. Are you sure the customer wants what you're producing?

"Do not assume you know what they want. You have to speak to many of them, and really listen," Ayer advised. "Ask open-ended questions about what challenges they are facing, or concerns they have, or what they feel is missing in their lives."

Find out what the customer wants, find a way you can deliver it, and you've made a loyal customer, Ayer advises.

Identifying the specific demands in every step of your production process is the best way to successfully ensure that you will be able to deliver the product your customer wants.

"Before launching any project or business, it's important to research whether the raw materials for production are readily available, how the infrastructure of transportation, storage, and packaging is developed; and to fully understand the possible markets for the product."

Packaging design may not be a farmer's strongest skill, but that's another important detail in the delivery process, Ayer said, if your product is going to stand out from the competition.

By paying attention to each of these details, by imposing standards of accountability and traceability, Ayer says an agricultural producer will also be able to insure product quality is maintained. Certainty and quality at every step allows the farmer to offer a consumer his product with pride and assurance.

Farmers Turn to Conservation Tillage to Boost Soil Health

More and more African farmers have turned to conservation tillage to maintain the health of the soil in their fields.

According to the University of Minnesota, which cooperates on agricultural research with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, conservation tillage is any method of soil cultivation that leaves residue from the previous season's crop — for instance, maize stalks or wheat stubble — on a field before and after planting the next season's crop. Traditionally, farmers ploughed residue back into the soil before planting a new crop.

Maize grows in rows surrounded by  residue from last season's crop.

Conservation tillage, which has gained in popularity worldwide in recent decades, improves on the traditional method because it enables roots to better capture plant nutrients and water, enhancing crop growth in dry periods or in dry soil. In the long term, it helps communities develop resilience to weather extremes that cause fluctuating growing conditions, according to the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) promotes conservation tillage as a way to protect soils from erosion leading to desertification. "The current rate of soil degradation threatens the capacity of future generations to meet their needs," states the agency, which adopted 2015 as the International Year of Soils.

Conservation tillage methods include no-till, strip-till, ridge-till and mulch-till.

- No-till and strip-till involve planting crops directly into residue from the previous season's crop that hasn't been tilled (no-till) or has been tilled only in narrow strips with the rest of the field left untilled (strip-till).
- Ridge-till involves planting row crops on permanent ridges about 12 centimeters high. The previous crop's residue is cleared off ridges into adjacent furrows. Maintaining the ridges is essential.
- Mulch-till is a method that leaves at least 30 percent of the soil surface covered with crop residue.

Research shows that conservation tillage also benefits the environment by:

- Reducing soil erosion by as much as 60 percent, depending on the tillage method and amount of residue left to shield soil from rain and wind.
- Adding organic matter to soil.
- Decreasing farmers' expenditures on fuel and planting because fewer tractor trips across the field are needed.

- Reducing potential air pollution from dust and diesel emissions.
- Reducing soil compaction that can interfere with plant growth.

As an added benefit, crop residue provides food and cover for wildlife, while buffers like grass strips and forests adjacent to waterways defend against water pollution by trapping and filtering any sediment that does leave the field.

[Change Our World for the Better: Careers in Agriculture](#)

“There are still numerous untapped opportunities [in agriculture] for passionate young Africans.”

— Ndidi Nwuneli

Nigerian businesswoman Ndidi Nwuneli believes that Africa’s agriculture sector “presents unique opportunities for young African leaders who want to serve as change agents on the continent.” Nwuneli co-founded AACE Food Processing and Distribution Ltd. and is a partner in Sahel Capital Partners in Nigeria.

According to the World Bank, agriculture is essential for sub-Saharan Africa’s growth and for achieving the goal of halving poverty by 2015. The sector employs 65 percent of Africa’s labor force and accounts for 32 percent of the region’s gross domestic product. Increased agricultural production is expected to continue to support growth in Africa’s economy, the bank reports.

Ndidi Nwuneli



Women’s advocate and agribusiness specialist Ruth Oniang’o shares Nwuneli’s belief that agriculture makes a good career choice. “Young people have a great opportunity to create jobs and to contribute to feeding the continent in a sustainable way. Agriculture is now great business,” she said, citing growing global focus on hunger and malnutrition.

Oniang’o founded the Rural Outreach Programme in Kenya, an advocacy group for women and youth in agriculture. She is an honorary professor of nutrition at the Great Lakes University of Kisumu, Kenya; editor-in-chief of the African Journal of Food, Agriculture, Nutrition and Development based in Nairobi; and chair of the Sasakawa Africa Association, which focuses on agricultural development in Ethiopia, Nigeria, Mali and Uganda.

The agricultural experts welcomed queries for advice for members of the YALI Network.

Nwuneli says that she is “excited about the impact that young Africans” might make through the leadership, partnership and mentoring programs available through the YALI Network and the Mandela Washington Fellowship program.

Ruth Oniang’o



“I urge [YALI Network members] to use the amazing exposure, training and networks that you have gained through YALI, coupled with your talents, time and energy, to change our world for the better,” Nwuneli said. “I pray that you will find your life’s purpose early in life, and that you will pursue it passionately, diligently and ethically.”

Nwuneli urges African youth to consider careers in agriculture as entrepreneurs or employment with an agribusiness or in public policymaking. For those considering starting their own companies, “There are still numerous untapped opportunities for passionate young Africans who want to engage across the agricultural value chain from inputs, to production, to post-harvest, storage, logistics, processing, distribution, and information and communications technology,” she says.

“If you are passionate and resilient, you will ultimately enjoy the fruits of your labor,” she states.

“There are many multinational and indigenous companies and civil society organizations in the agribusiness sector that are desperately looking for hardworking and committed employees with strong ethical values,” Nwuneli says.

“These companies are interested in hiring young Africans, regardless of their education background or work experiences, provided they have a strong interest in learning more about the agricultural sector and taking on the challenges and opportunities that the sector presents.”

In the area of policy, Nwuneli says, “there is still a strong need for reforms in the agricultural sector within countries and across regions in Africa. African youth who are passionate about policy reforms can serve as advocates in the public sector, pushing for an enabling environment for agribusinesses to thrive [and] necessary investment in infrastructure.”

“The time for Africa is now,” Oniang’o adds.

Small Farmers Face Opportunities and Challenges

By Madison Ayer, Executive Chairman of [Farm Shop](#) and Chairman and CEO of [Honey Care Africa](#)

Smallholder farmers working in rural areas dominate agribusiness in Africa. The need around the

world for more food and more diverse types of foods gives these small farmers great opportunity, but the challenges they face are significant also. 

At Honey Care Africa, we partner with smallholder farmers across East Africa to strengthen incomes and expand Africa's honey output through sustainable beekeeping. We understand the problems facing small producers and have a rich history in helping them overcome these challenges.

We have discovered that understanding both inputs and outputs distribution is key to success in agribusiness, so we work to support farmers in learning about and adapting to these methods.

Inputs. Poor inputs — seeds, plant material, water, fertilizers and pesticides — and farming methods keep African smallholder farmers far below the world averages for agricultural productivity.

- *Working with smallholders:* It is common practice for small-scale producers to enter contracts for product delivery to the companies who use and market raw agricultural products. These arrangements are called “outgrower” schemes or direct buying. These agreements make smallholder farmers critical components for agribusinesses. Both partners need to make efforts to build trust and loyalty in their relationships and to work effectively in a network of producers.
- *Quality strategy:* A farmer must produce something of value to have a competitive advantage in his market. People want to eat good, nutritious food that has been sustainably produced. Agricultural products must be good quality, and the grower must know how to control that quality. The grower must also be well-versed in understanding and meeting any certification requirements. Meeting those standards is the best way for the grower to establish product quality and credibility with buyers and other contractual partners.
- *Logistics, transport and storage:* Most farming is done in rural areas, far from the established infrastructure of city centers. Farmers must establish supply sources and routes for all those things they need to produce a crop. They must identify and account for the costs of transport and develop backup plans for those occasions when weather and conditions might impede delivery.
- *Modern farming methods:* Many high-productivity and sustainable agricultural practices have been developed in the world, but most African production is still very traditional. Farmers need to have information sources to better understand regional or global trends in their specialties. They need to stay up-to-date with the latest training and production techniques.

Outputs. Farmers must have a keen vision of their customers, what they need and how to communicate with them.

-  *Customer insights:* Producers can't assume that a great product will have buyers lining up at the door. Farmers must clearly identify their customers' needs and the types and volumes of products that they are likely to buy. The farmer needs to understand why customers are interested in their raw materials and what they'll be doing with the commodities.
- *Product-market fit:* By studying needs and behaviors of your prospective buyers, you can get to market acceptance of your product faster. Remember that changing behaviors is difficult, time-consuming and expensive. It is easier to change your product. The successful farmer will offer a product that a chosen customer thinks is truly valuable.
- *Distribution channels:* Once a target customer is identified and the marketability of the product is established, the producer needs to figure out how to get the product to the customer. This is hard

work, scrapping in the streets to build distribution systems and convince buyers to buy. A producer must assess the distribution of customers and the difficulties of delivery conditions and decide how marketing, advertising and promotion might aid sales.

- *Unit economics*: Once the producer identifies the customers and how to reach them, ensuring that the delivery systems are affordable is critical. The successful farmer is going to be obsessive about the unit economics of the product. To succeed in agribusiness, the producer must scale production and distribution and make a profit. Consider everything: cost of goods, packaging, wastage and product replacements.

At Honey Care Africa, we see an exciting future as we lead Africa into the global honey market. The same opportunities are available to other African agricultural sectors.

Madison Ayer is the chairman and CEO of [Honey Care Africa](#), producing and distributing trusted, pure honey through a network of thousands of smallholder farmers in Kenya, South Sudan and Tanzania. Ayer is also the executive chairman of [Farm Shop](#), providing smallholders with farm inputs through a modern retail platform and with franchised shops in villages in rural Kenya.

[Blog Aims to Shape Conversation About Agriculture](#)

Kenyan farmer David Mwenda wants to “shape the conversation” about the future of African agriculture.

The 29-year-old African leader believes “the future of agriculture lies in the hands of youth.” To support his conviction, he created [Foundation for Young Farmers](#), a blog that in July won the Youth in Agriculture prize at the Fin4Ag International Conference in Nairobi. Fin4Ag, With the theme of “revolutionising finance for agri-value chains,” the conference brought together investors and people with ideas for ways to boost agricultural production and improve food processing and distribution.

In his blog and on [Twitter](#), Mwenda, a YALI Network member, is building an online community of youth who value agriculture as a viable and needed profession. With an active online presence, he coaches his audience about the benefits of sustainable farming practices like mixed farming — or growing crops along with raising livestock — and methods that conserve water like no-till farming.

Two children pushing wheelbarrows 
through garden (Courtesy of Foundation
for Young Farmers)

“We try to change their current practices into agribusiness and to create a source of income and employment,” he says.

Mwenda wants his blog to provide information to help link farmers to markets, teach them to keep accurate farm records and to handle food properly, and encourage organizations to come together to provide young farmers with equipment like tractors.

On his two hectares, Mwenda raises dairy cows, sheep, rabbits, chickens and bees and grows a variety of vegetables. He wants his farm to eventually be a “one-stop demo farm” for youth to visit and see modern sustainable agriculture practices.

He reminds YALI Network members considering a future in agriculture that “the most important trait for success is perseverance. “Bigger rewards will ultimately be,” he says to his readers, many of whom were raised on subsistence agriculture. “Agriculture can be a gold mine for young entrepreneurs.”

Mwenda’s blog has become a platform for young Africans engaged in agriculture to discuss their shared problems and to look for solutions. The blogger responds to readers’ comments and uses their comments as starting points for additional entries.

Among the comments the blog has received are:

- “Young people are starting to gain interest in agriculture. They, however, need a platform where they can share their stories, be encouraged and given opportunity to learn. I support this blog because it is showing and highlighting these experiences.”
- “We all need food for our survival and therefore young farmers and agriculturalists play a major role in making sure demand for food is met on [a] daily basis. ...This can be achieved through blogs, forums involving local people and farm exhibitions.”
- “Agriculture is widely viewed [as] an occupation for the elderly or retired in rural areas. This idea has to change.”
- “We are still at the first stage of changing minds. ... The youth will embrace this.”

Read Mwenda’s blog [Foundation for Young Farmers](#) to learn more about why agriculture is a smart career choice or join the conversation to discuss ideas and solutions you may be looking for in your agribusiness.

Cassava is ‘Hidden Gold,’ Kenyan Says

“It is the highest time for young Africans to take the leadership in many sectors of the economy.”

— Nickson Muturi

Creative entrepreneurs like YALI Network member Nickson Muturi know how to get the most from

the resources they have.

Muturi, a 24-year-old cassava farmer and recent graduate of Kenya's Egerton University, founded Bites Cassava Millers Ltd. in Nyeri, Kenya. In 2013 he began to explore ways to extract extra value from cassava, a staple that many considered "poor man's

Nickson Muturi harvests cassava on his  farm in Kenya.

food." In the process, he developed ways to turn cassava into flour and inexpensive animal feed. His work earned him a 2014 Agribiz4Africa award.

Cassava is a tuberous plant, rich in carbohydrates. Muturi considers the tuber "hidden gold" and wants to tell "as many people as possible, especially those in harsh climatic conditions, how they can use cassava to transform their lives."

He used some of his award money to purchase cassava stems, which he gave to skeptical farmers to plant. He reaches out to other farmers through local media and mobile phones.

To produce flour from the tuber, Muturi cuts cassava into small pieces and soaks the pieces in water to clean them of any chemicals. He then adds a sodium preservative, puts the pieces into polythene bags and places the bags in the sun so the pieces will dry. The drying method is "environment-friendly and makes the drying process faster," he says. He then mills the dry pieces into flour and sieves it to remove large particles.

Muturi uses the plant's leaves and stems for animal feed. "I ensure that nothing goes to waste," he says, adding that his methods can be applied to other foods like rice, yams, maize, millet and sorghum.

Poultry farmers are buying the animal feed, and bakeries and other food service providers are buying the cassava flour Muturi produces.

Muturi cuts cassava stems for animal  feed.

Like any entrepreneur, Muturi has encountered challenges. "Many people thought that as a university student, I was not supposed to be working in the agricultural sector," he says. "I have proved that nothing is impossible and that farming is cool and sexy."

Muturi says the YALI Network has exposed him to other young Africans' ideas: "I get a lot of inspiration from their stories."

He says his professional goal is to develop work skills that reflect determination, adaptability and integrity. On a personal level, he aims to expect less and give more to society. He used another portion of his award to pay the school fees of two women working toward certificates in coffee growing.

"I think it is the highest time for young Africans to take the leadership in many sectors of the

economy. They have the energy and capability to drive these sectors to great success,” Muturi says.

Agribiz4Africa aims to generate ideas that can transform agricultural productivity and rural economies and create jobs. The competition is sponsored by the agricultural company Syngenta.

YALI Network Shares Year-End Reflections

Reflecting over the past year, members of the YALI Network Facebook community shared their thoughts and aspirations in response to the question “How do you define success?”

“To me, success is being able to rise above the narrow confines of my individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all Humanity,” wrote Nyasha Shoriwa from Zimbabwe.

Photographer Vince Ras Otti, writing from Kenya, had a similar definition:

“Success is bringing the people together and embracing humanity.”

Building a life that is based on a higher purpose than the self is another goal shared by YALI friends on Facebook.

“Success is knowing what you are born to do — your purpose of being on this earth — and working in that regard to impact the lives of the people around you, your environment and the world at large,” wrote Prosper Dzitse from Accra, Ghana.

The theme of persistence in the pursuit of one’s goals appeared to be a resounding aspiration among YALI Facebook friends.

Graduates of the Aiyedere 

Ajibola Senior Secondary

School celebrate their 2014 success.

“Success is being able to believe in your goals and dreams and pursue them till they become reality,” wrote Sindiswa Olivier from South Africa. He said your ability to chase “doubt and negativity out from your mind” and remain confident in your beliefs is another demonstration of success.

Nigerian Obiora Obetta observed that success “encompasses all breakthroughs and all failure from which you garner invaluable experiences for better result.”

Fred Valentim is a native Angolan living in Paraguay during 2014. “Success means to keep moving with our thoughts whether we do well or not, just moving forward for a good purpose. ... Success

means helping others dealing with failures [and] thinking better for a future of tomorrow.”

YALI Facebook friend Nkocngphile Davies Nkambule of Swaziland posted,

“Achieving dreams that seem to be impossible, that’s how I can define success.”

YALI Facebook friends clarified their views on success as a year-end exercise, but they also reflected on the life lessons that came to them over the past 12 months. From Kenya, Benedict Muyale Ben said, “Patience pays — you don’t have to be great to get started, but you [must] start to be great.”

Atiol Oduho, also from Kenya, advised, “Procrastination is the enemy of progress. Self-doubt is an obstacle to your potential. Being true to yourself is all the fuel you need for the success in any of your endeavours.”

Sudanese Altayeb Elsheikh closes the YALI Network reflections on 2014 with concise wisdom that shone most brightly through his year: “Keep learning, keep doing and keep improving.”

Go back to the [YALI Network Facebook community](#) and start networking!

[#YALICHATs - A Year In Review](#)

Since the first #YALICHAT in March 2014, the YALI Network has connected members with experts in a variety of fields to talk about issues that are important to their continuing education and awareness. The #YALICHATs provide an opportunity to engage on timely and interesting subjects — to hear stories, ask questions, get answers and real-world advice from experts, and hopefully, feel inspired and encouraged. We’ve collected the history of #YALICHATs [here](#), and what follows are the highlights from our first twelve months.

The Twitter and Facebook #YALICHATs have covered a range of topics, from U.S. government policy to entrepreneurship, leadership, civic engagement and the devastating effects of Ebola. Click on the embedded links below to revisit these chats.

The first live online engagement with the newly formed [Young African Leaders Initiative Network](#) featured three senior officials at the U.S. Department of State: [Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Richard Stengel](#); [Evan Ryan, assistant secretary, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs](#); and [Macon Phillips, coordinator, Bureau of International Information Programs](#). Questions focused on education, entrepreneurship, agriculture, trade and the 2014 Mandela Washington Fellowship.

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry 
Twitter Chat with the YALI Network

In May, [Secretary of State John Kerry](#) held a Twitter chat with the YALI Network. The secretary answered questions on his travels in Africa, peace and security, economic growth, Boko Haram and his hopes for African youth. His advice to the YALI Network: “Be inquisitive. Learn as much as possible. Never give up. Call it like it is. Perseverance.” Other government leaders who engaged with the YALI Network included [U.S. Senator Christopher Coons](#) from Delaware, who as a young man lived and worked in Africa, and [Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for African Affairs Grant Harris](#), who received over 2,000 tweets from the Network in just one hour.

Encouraging new entrepreneurship — both for commercial development and the social good — is one of the primary goals of the YALI Network, and there were several chats with successful business and social entrepreneurs. Fahad Hassan, social entrepreneur and CEO of @AlwaysPrepped, joined U.S. Department of State Special Adviser for Global Youth Issues Zeenat Rahman to talk about [launching a business that addresses societal needs](#). When asked for a key challenge facing African social entrepreneurs, Fahad said “immediate success.” He encouraged the YALI Network to “have patience and understand big problems take a long time to solve.” Other #YALICHAT speakers on entrepreneurship included Professor [Michael Goldberg](#) and [Sheena Lindahl](#), co-founder and CEO of Empact.

Leadership is another key focus for the YALI Network. To commemorate the 2014 FIFA World Cup, the YALI Network engaged with three former athletes who’ve made the successful transition from player to leadership roles. Former NBA player and current NBA global ambassador [Dikembe Mutombo](#), Olympian and U.S. women’s national soccer team alum [Mary Harvey](#), and former NFL linebacker and current Illinois state Senator [Napoleon Harris](#) engaged with the YALI Network on what it takes to establish oneself in a leadership role. Congolese native Mutombo signed off his #YALICHAT with this wish: “My hope is that the Africa of my ancestors will be totally different than the Africa of my descendants. You will be part of that journey.”

August and December featured #YALICHATs on Ebola. The first was held with officials from the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). Questions from the YALI Network focused on the origins of the outbreak, plans for controlling its spread and caring for the sick. [Saran Kaba Jones](#), a Liberian American, chatted with the YALI Network about her current efforts to bring safe water and hygiene to rural Africa. She described how communities are coming together to support the healed victims of the disease, many of whom are facing misunderstanding and stigmatization when they return to their homes.

The business of farming is a topic that many YALI Network members have expressed a strong interest in. As part of January’s focus on agriculture, one #YALICHAT featured [Madison Ayer](#), CEO of Honeycare Africa and executive chairman of Farm Shop. Ayer provided guidance to YALI Network members on establishing and maintaining smallholder farms, logistics and distribution, product-market fit, and adapting to modern farming methods.

Democracy, good governance, and citizen responsibility were the focus of two #YALICHATs held in February, 2015. The first was with [Chris Spence](#), chief technology officer at the National Democratic Institute (NDI). NDI is a nonpartisan organization that works to strengthen democratic institutions worldwide and encourages citizen participation, openness, and accountability in government. The second #YALICHAT featured one of the very first chat participants, [Macon Phillips](#). Macon was joined by two 2014 Mandela Washington Fellows, Sobel Ngom and Chedi Ngulu. This special live

#YALICHAT centered on engaging youth in the democratic process and developing resources and tools to encourage citizen involvement in government.

Many more chats on these and other interesting subjects are on the calendar in 2015. Stay connected with the YALI Network through [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) to learn about future #YALICHATS.

[Africa's Youth Must Take Up Challenge to Develop Africa](#)

YALI Network Member Collins Mabinda recent op-ed in [All Africa](#):

Recently, I joined a network of young Africans who are each working in a myriad of ways to develop the continent. I joined the Young African Leaders Initiative Network, which is an initiative of the United States government and African countries. The initiative seeks to promote a peaceful, stable, and prosperous Africa that is open for business, entrepreneurship, and civic opportunities.

Each of the YALI network members has pledged to help develop Africa in their own little way.

Among the YALI network members, there is a flourishing farmer in Morogoro, Tanzania, a civic leader in Lagos, Nigeria who is fighting against malaria in a sprawling slum in Lagos, and a Zimbabwean entrepreneur who founded the first innovation hub in Zimbabwe, Hypercube. Some of the YALI network members will be chosen to become Mandela Fellows, which will see them attend leading institutions in the United States for eight weeks. An additional small group will stay behind and be offered internship opportunities in leading companies in the US. Ultimately, the fellowship will culminate in a Presidential Summit with US President Barack Obama.

The partnership between the United States and Africa is now informed by the fact that Africa has to move from the periphery of world affairs, and move to the centre, where it becomes part and parcel of the global conversation.

This is an Africa that will be known for its opportunities and will be at the desk of policymakers in the White House, London, and other global capitals is what we seek as YALI network members.

Evidently, not all of us will be selected to become Mandela Fellows. However, I urge even those who will not be selected to become Mandela Fellows to continue engaging in the various networking opportunities, and work to build Africa one step at a time. One day, their efforts will be rewarded, and they will get other opportunities to showcase their talents.

Moreover, as young Africans, it is our duty to ensure that we create a new narrative for Africa. Africa is on the brink of takeoff, never mind a few instabilities here and there. It would be a tragedy

if outsiders see Africa's potential, but Africans don't see this potential.
