There is a long-standing tradition in the United States of farmers helping other farmers in times of need. When a neighbour experiences hard times, others have always been ready to help plant, bring in the crops, care for the animals – whatever it takes to get the farmer back on his or her feet.

In this same spirit, farmers from all around the US are lending a hand to their world neighbours as they recover from natural and man-made disasters, chronic hunger and malnutrition. They come together through the Foods Resource Bank (FRB), a US-based non-governmental organisation that works to create lasting solutions to world hunger, one village at a time.

Forming volunteer FRB “growing projects”, men and women in rural areas across the US raise money by producing a crop or commodity, selling it, and making the proceeds available to FRB and its member organisations (15 Christian denominations and their agencies and in-country partners) for food security programmes in the developing world.

FRB’s focus is local, long-term, smallholder agricultural solutions to chronic hunger situations, trusting that if people have basic resources and agricultural know-how, they will build a living for themselves.

Across the Pacific
One of FRB’s growing project groups, a dairy cooperative in rural Ithaca, New York, decided to reach out to cattle farmers in various rural areas of Mozambique because, as dairy farmers, they could understand the needs of the farmers there.

They knew that cows give food, provide fertiliser, help in tilling and ploughing the land, create job opportunities which keep people from migrating to cities, and even protect the
environment by eating the native grasses and preventing grass fires which can devastate crops and fruit trees.

After 17 years of civil war, floods and fire in Mozambique, the cattle herd, formerly the mainstay of the local way of life, was reduced by 90%. By 2004, when the FRB programme first started, the absence of cows had resulted in severe malnutrition through a lack of dairy and protein substances, and the infant mortality rate was 50% for children under the age of five.

**Coins and cows**
The Ithaca project donated the annual income of milk sales from five of their cows to FRB for support of the Mozambique cattle programme, and two of the cooperative members travelled to Mozambique with FRB in 2007 to learn more about the people there.

The US dairy farmers donated the value of milk from one cow for one year. That amounts to about $3,000. At the churches, there were milk cartons set up to fill with coins. There also was a metal silo in the lobby of each church and on “Noisy Sunday” people would bring their money to plunk into the silo.

In all, US$20,000 was raised each year and this brought about 100 cows each year for the people of Mozambique.

One of the visitors, Diane Eldred, said: “There are ten families in each village that receive two cows apiece. The people take ownership. We are helping them to help themselves.”

Eldred indicated that the FRB programme promotes food security and family and community health. The programme is benefiting 265 households, 1,855 individuals in 55 communities and with a budget of US$50,000.

In Mozambique, the FRB and its members, led by World Hope International (WHI), endeavour to reduce malnutrition and provide rural communities with the opportunity for economic
Teaching self-sufficiency
Why do the farmers in Ithaca, New York, and others in states like Iowa, Michigan, Missouri, Kansas and Indiana work so hard to reach out to people they may never meet?

“We are not a ‘hand-out’ programme, we are a ‘hand-up’ programme ... helping hungry people produce their own food so they can count on having enough to eat, with dignity and pride. We are getting at the root cause of poverty. It is the only way we can eliminate world hunger,” says Dottie Neal, of the FRB growing project in Schoolcraft, Michigan.

The farms involved in the programme are Scipio Springs Dairy, Willet Dairy, Oakwood Dairy in Aurelius, Patterson Farms, Twin Birch Dairy, Hardie Farms, Barbland Dairy, Aurora Ridge Dairy and Sunnyside Farm.

(For more information on FRB’s programmes in the developing world, please visit www.foodsresourcebank.org.)