

Story from Niger
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God saw ... it was very good

I have the privilege of being involved with a project called Sowing Seeds of Change in the Sahel (SSCS) since 2015. We work in the areas of agriculture and community health, but as an agronomist I have been predominantly involved with the agricultural work. As Christians we believe that God has entrusted the earth to us to take care of (Gen. 2:15). Even though our sinning spoiled things, many Biblical references help us understand that this mandate still stands. In order to explain what this may look like in practice, let me share what at SSCS we have, among others, been working on. Looking around in our area of the world, the Maradi region in Niger, it doesn't take much to understand that agricultural practices in recent history have had a destructive influence on the environment (deforestation and loss of soil fertility). At SSCS we have the privilege of managing a farm of 23 ha. Our predecessors already started working on preserving/regenerating and planting trees on the property. And over the past 7 years we have worked on taking additional measures to restore soil fertility. During the first 6 of those 7 years we needed to bring in significant amounts of manure to have enough to spread out on the fields as fertilizer – or in other words: to give back to the soil what we had taken from it the year before at harvest time. Last year however, as a result of progressively improved soil fertility in combination with some other management techniques we have reached a point where the crops produced so well that on top of a good harvest we had a very good amount of crop residues. We combined this with the manure our own two bulls (draft animals) had produced over several months and converted it into compost. The amount of compost this gave us was enough to spread out on the fields for the next cropping season; we no longer needed to bring in manure. This is our story in a nutshell of course, but the point is that we are clearly seeing the difference between the productive (or constructive) results of working in a way that is in accordance with God's mandate to take care of creation and the unproductive (or destructive) results of ways of working that do not take care of creation. And I think that this is the challenge for all of us; to look around us and think about ways in which we can help being productive/constructive contributors in the care for God's creation – or in other words: to reflect on ways in which we are being either good or bad stewards of this earth that God has entrusted to us.

