



Farmers grow a variety of produce on 1-4-acre plots at In Harmony Farm in central Iowa.

A Fresh Start

Up-and-coming farmers find peace, purpose, and a path to independence in Iowa.

By **Lisa Foust Prater**

One of the best decisions I made this year was joining the board of directors for In Harmony Farm (IHF).

The nonprofit offers affordable access to land, and works with farmers to establish markets, learn business strategies, utilize regenerative practices, care for the environment, and build community. This allows them to scale production gradually, with the goal of building long-term financial independence.

Thirteen farmers are enrolled in our program, representing nine farms. Each grows produce on 1-4-acre plots on our main campus and outreach farm in central Iowa.

Although any up-and-coming farmer can apply for the program, all but two of the current IHF farmers are refugees from Burundi, in east-central Africa. The others are from Cameroon, in west-central Africa. The United Nations defines a refugee as "someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because

of persecution, war, or violence."

Burundi is one of the poorest countries in the world, and 60% of its children are considered malnourished, according to the Borgen Project. The nation has been plagued by civil war, political turmoil, violence, and deteriorating human rights conditions.

These farmers managed to survive unfathomable danger and merciless violence, spent time in multiple refugee camps, and — by some miracle — eventually found themselves in Iowa. Can you imagine?

At a farm-to-table dinner at IHF in September, one of the farmers spoke to the crowd. He told us about growing up on a farm in Burundi, and said he's so happy to be able to grow some of the crops he remembers from his family's farm, sharing familiar foods with the African community, and introducing new flavors to his neighbors here in Iowa.

He and his fellow farmers are finding peace in farming again. Putting their hands in the dirt. Planting seeds from their homeland. Seeing them sprout and bear fruit in their new home in Iowa. Connecting to their history while building a new future.

I'm so honored to be part that mission. Learn more at inharmonyfarm.org.