Unexpected farmer

Meet our July Member of the month; Jimmy Ouni who never thought farming was for him but is now a successful Agripreneur. Here are excerpts from Jimmy Ouni’s Q&A.

My name is Jimmy Ouni and I am the Finance & SME Manager of Truism Holdings Limited. I originally had no interest in farming but my drive into agriculture came from “Imat Lucy”, an elderly woman I met in northern Uganda whilst working as a site foreman with Save the Children. Lucy, who was ill at the time, was selling off her land in order to seek medical attention. “Imat” is a respectful way of addressing the elderly in the Langi culture.

Meeting “Imat Lucy” during an on-site supervision role with Save the Children, Jimmy Ouni was rewarded with her 2.5 acre piece of land for offering to pay off her medical bills. Though Jimmy was not keen on practising farming on the land, “Imat Lucy” convinced and encouraged him to plough and plant on the land. Jimmy reluctantly obliged; not because he believed it could become a way of life for him, but because he felt an obligation to honour “Imat Lucy’s” request.

On the farm, he planted soya, maize, cassava, beans and sweet potatoes; a harvest that gave him a lot more profits than he anticipated. What he reaped from his first harvest immediately propelled Jimmy into farming.

In addition to being the Chief Finance Officer (CFO) of Truism Holdings Limited, the youth member farmer is also actively involved in AgriProFocus activities like chairing the soil care Community of Practice; but he also helps coach farmers on animal traction, vendor selection for agro-inputs and group marketing of produce. And his story can’t be told enough!

Truism Holdings Limited’s founder Jimmy Ouni, who has spent years in the finance & accounting world, decided it was time to solve the conundrum on removing unhealthy chemicals from the locally-made peanut butter, so that the consumers could not only get a tastier product, but also munch on a healthier snack.

Can you tell us a little bit about you and how this idea began?

My name is Jimmy Ouni and I am the Finance & SME Manager of Truism Holdings Limited. I originally had no interest in farming but my drive into agriculture came from “Imat Lucy”, an elderly woman I met in northern Uganda whilst working as a site foreman with Save the Children. Lucy, who was ill at the time, was selling off her land in order to seek medical attention.
I paid her no-so-expensive medical bill and in return, “Imat Lucy” gave me her piece of land to farm on. With encouragement and supervision from her, I tilled the land; planted my crop and harvested more than double the amount of finances I had initially input. This opened my eyes and my interest in agriculture! With a couple of friends, we started Truism Holdings Limited with a vision to provide support to other farmers through animal traction training, vendor selection for agro-inputs and group marketing of produce and also provide healthier, tastier peanut butter with the true northern cuisine taste.

**What is Truism Holdings, exactly?**

Truism is a word coined from the term “undisputed truth;” a term that sums up our customers access to the best products. We are a group of farmers who specialise in sesame, soybeans and beans. We also provide support to other farmers through animal traction training, vendor selection for agro-inputs and group marketing of produce. Our mission is to create a healthier snack, that’s better for the eaters and better for the farmers. The peanut butter we produce is fresher than those sold at the supermarkets; giving our customers full accountability of where their peanut butter is coming from.

**How did you come up with the idea?**

When we started, we were a group of friends with different expertise; but had a general liking for farming in common. We combined our financial knowledge, IT skills, agriculture knowledge, logistics management & marketing knowledge and saw two things happening. Growing and producing the tastiest; healthiest peanut butter.

We did a lot of market research, and there was also a huge segment of the population who said, “I aspire to buy my peanut butter at the supermarket, but because it peanut products on the shelves usually have sand, are burnt and have a bitter taste; I decline to purchase the peanut butter.” We saw that as an opportunity to build a service that would give a tastier, healthier peanut butter product to a much broader segment of the population.

Secondly, the farms were coming to us and saying, “I need help with the logistics. I’m really good at growing, but I’m not as good at coordinating the logistics or marketing and sales to find the customer. I need more access to customers.” We then took this opportunity to provide support to the farmers through animal traction training, vendor selection for agro-inputs and group marketing of produce.
What problem are you trying to fix?
Looking at the non-agricultural based services; we are working to bridge the gap between farmers and some of these services; such as financial literacy training, financial management as a tool to making agriculture more profitable. We are also working to supplement government efforts towards providing extension services to communities.
We would like our customers to get access to the best, healthiest produce possible that is fresh, directly from harvest, grown sustainably and produced in a healthy way. On the supply side, we want to connect suppliers directly to the consumers, to help farmers build market relations with companies.

How would you describe your success so far?
We have hit a few milestones that we are proud of; processing peanut butter and sesame paste and getting it to the market; though very labour intensive, is one of our accomplishments - we are looking forward to mechanising the process to include a processing plant. We have also mobilised over 3000 farmers, trained them in animal traction and financial management and are also managing 320 acres of farmland.
Truiism products are also in four African countries so far, and we’re pushing out in all directions. We are in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). We are in Rwanda, and we recently launched in the Sudan region.