

# PURE RELIGION

## As Ye Reap, So Shall Ye Sow

“I’m just an old farmer,” says 61-year-old John Hess of Ashton, Idaho. Actually, Brother Hess comes from a heritage of farmers. His grandfather acquired a 40-acre farm in 1908. Nearly 100 years later, the farm has grown to 2,700 acres and, thanks to Brother Hess’s involvement in cutting-edge technology, was used as a test site for a national experiment that coupled computer and satellite technology with traditional farming methods.

So, when the Belarus Department of Agriculture requested an adviser to help with their lagging potato harvest, the LDS Church Humanitarian Service pressed “old farmer” John and his wife, Shirley, into service.

“We didn’t go there to help,” John says. “We went there to roll up our sleeves and participate in their struggle—a struggle an old potato farmer knows all too well.”

The Ministry of Agriculture gave Brother Hess 1,300 acres in several different plots, plots that were situated next to state farms. He resisted the temptation to import seed, tools, and fertilizer, feeling it was important to use only the things that were readily available in Belarus.

As he went to work, Brother Hess immediately noticed a few things he could do to improve yield. The seed provided by the government was infected by a virus, and he knew how to clean that up. He planted his seed in wider rows and deeper in the ground and used a readily available chemical to reduce weeds. As he planted the seed, he prayed that the Lord would prosper his work.

When harvest time arrived, the farmers began pulling potatoes from the state plots. The yield was 50 sacks per hectare (about 2 ½ acres). Considering it takes 22 sacks of seed to plant, the turnout was poor indeed. Because of the

limited rainfall, however, many had predicted a poor harvest. In fact, the 50 sacks per hectare were exactly what many had predicted.

Then they moved three feet over and began harvesting Brother Hess’s plots. The earth was packed with potatoes, some so large it was hard to pick them up with one hand, and there were so many of them—550 sacks per hectare, 11 times the yield of the other plots!

At first, no one could believe the difference. Perhaps they had salted the plot with potatoes, perhaps they had been working secretly through the night, or perhaps they were hiding the weeds. In fact, some were so skeptical they insisted on an official investigation. But the more they investigated, the more they realized that the potato missionaries had

worked a miracle.

Before Brother Hess returned to the United States, he took a basket filled with potatoes to the Minister of Religion. “These are from the plots we planted,” he told him. The Minister of Religion asked if Brother Hess had another basket, one he could give to the President’s chief of staff, the virtual Vice President of Belarus. When they took the basket to the President’s chief of staff and told him their story, the chief of staff asked if by chance Brother Hess had one more basket of potatoes, one they could give to the President of Belarus.

A year later, many farms in Belarus are using the same planting system introduced by Brother Hess. Where once there was discouragement, today there is growing hope and optimism. And if you ask the potato farmers from Belarus why, they will tell you it’s because of an “old farmer” from Idaho, a humanitarian service missionary from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

