

VANUATU

Samson Mahit Haitong

Samson Mahit Haiton is, most likely, the first winner of a Model Farmer Award who has been farming full-time for less than one year. In that sense, Samson has proved that making a lasting impact needn't take a long time.

The son of subsistence farmers in the Pacific Island Country of Vanuatu, Samson completed 10th grade at school. Then he took an exam and became a nurse. He cared for patients in the capital of Port Vila and his village of Tetali.

Three years ago, Samson's older brother asked him for help to invest in a 1.5-hectare pineapple farm in Tetali. The brother eventually discovered, however, that he hated farming. So Samson was left to till the land part-time while still working as a nurse. It wasn't easy.

But life, in general, isn't easy in Vanuatu. Food at local markets is very expensive, Samson says, and many people are hungry. Market owners pay the farmers very little for their produce. Then they charge very high prices to consumers.

Samson grew enough pineapples and vegetables to feed his family and he gives some of his pineapples to hungry neighbors free of charge. He now grows enough produce to sell and that extra income has helped him expand his farm to 5 hectares.

But pineapple is a seasonal fruit. And so, last year, Samson attended a training course by a farmer from Fiji where he learned how to manipulate pineapple plants so that he could stagger their flowering and have fruit to sell all year round.

In January this year, as one of very few farmers with a constant stream of ripening fruit, Samson has managed to retire from nursing and he's now farming full-time.

Samson avoids selling to the big markets if he can. Instead, he prefers to sell his pineapples on a small plot next to his house in Port Vila. He sells them at prices that are, on average, 80 percent lower than those at the markets. As you can imagine, he has no shortage of customers.

Samson gets some higher prices selling directly to hotels and supermarkets. And he still gives away some of his fruit and vegetables to the hungry. Samson's goal now is to save enough money to open his own market – a fair market. His aim is not to become rich. He wants to help others. Farmers who sell at Samson's market will have to charge fair prices that people can afford.

None of my neighbors should be hungry, Samson says. When he achieves his goal, fewer of them will be. **Mr. Samson Mahit Haiton, Please!**