



*Rick Steves'*  
**EUROPE**

# CLIMATE SMART COMMITMENT

## 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

\$1 Million Invested in 11 Organizations



# Together, We Made a Difference with Our Inaugural Portfolio

In late 2019, Rick Steves' Europe launched our Climate Smart Commitment—a program designed to pay back the environmental debt created by our travelers flying to Europe to join our bus tours. At \$30 per person for our 30,000-plus travelers, we smartly invested \$1 million in a self-imposed carbon tax to creatively mitigate this carbon footprint. Inspired by our work in global poverty issues, we chose to innovate a new approach: investing in nonprofit organizations that fight climate change through on-the-ground work in the developing world and government advocacy in the US.

About half of the world's population is smallholder farmers and their families. And, in their desperation to grow enough food, their farming practices contribute substantially to climate change. Our goal is to support groups that work on either helping farmers in the developing world contribute less to climate change by employing climate-smart agriculture techniques (including protecting forests), or on advocating in Congress for smarter US government policies to fight climate change. (In order to keep their momentum, we have also allowed organizations to invest some of our grant money in combating the impact of COVID-19 in the communities in which they work.)

We selected a portfolio of 11 nonprofit organizations with missions that fit our goal, giving each between \$50,000 and \$200,000. And they immediately started putting those funds to work. Despite the global pandemic, these organizations persevered, delivered on their missions, and fulfilled their pledge to be transparent with us.

We're presenting this report to show our travelers (and those who might travel with us in the future) what we accomplished in the past year. Climate change and smart development can seem abstract. Reading how these organizations put our investment to good use inspires us with our ability to create change in faraway places—improving the lives of people less advantaged than we are while also taking meaningful steps toward addressing our changing climate. We are proud to offer those who take our tours the peace-of-mind that this “self-imposed carbon tax” effectively mitigates the carbon they emit to join us in Europe. Together, we're making a difference. It feels good. It's ethical as a business practice. And it's simply good global citizenship.

Looking ahead, we remain committed to investing \$30 per tour member in our Climate Smart portfolio each year. However, COVID-19 cancelled all of our 2020 tours. Despite this setback, we are determined to continue our program. That's why we pledge to invest 50 percent of what we would have in a normal year—that's \$500,000—for the second year of our Climate Smart Commitment.

This annual report shares what eight of our partner organizations accomplished with their 2019-20 grant. We hope you enjoy reading these reports.

Happy climate-smart travels,

Rick Steves

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## PHOTO CREDITS

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# Food 4 Farmers

DONATION: \$50,000

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Our donation allowed Food 4 Farmers (F4F) to teach climate-smart practices to six cooperatives representing more than 8,000 coffee-farming families in Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Columbia. Their goals: to strengthen local food systems, stabilize incomes, reduce deforestation, and enhance food security.

F4F educates farmers in three interconnected ways. Their Home Garden Program teaches local farmers how to ensure seed diversity, produce organic compost and pesticides, prevent soil erosion, and construct low-cost water management systems. Their Beekeeping and Farmers Market Programs help farmers generate supplemental income, replace processed foods and sugar with healthier alternatives, and create new local job opportunities. And their Community Promotor Program trains and empowers young women and men from each community to teach climate-smart techniques to more families, monitor existing programs, and solve problems as they arise—ensuring the long-term sustainability of the project.

So far, working with their six co-op partners, F4F has established 373 organic home gardens in Nicaragua and Columbia. In Mexico, 86 beekeepers saw a 41 percent increase in income due to improved honey quality and are now looking to gain an organic certification and expand their businesses. In Guatemala, 13 new beekeepers were added to the 36 already operating, and a nursery has been created to provide pollinator-friendly plants to the program participants for free. In addition, F4F provided 230 families with basic literacy training to help them improve the management of their farms, trained 29 new food security and beekeeping promotor, and developed four school gardens in Nicaragua (aimed at teaching 29 teachers and 657 students and their parents about good nutrition and healthy food).

Over the coming year, F4F will add 187 family gardens—17 in Nicaragua, 80 in Guatemala, and 90 in Columbia—and will expand into eight more schools in Nicaragua.



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**Food 4 Farmers (F4F) partners with coffee-farming families in Latin America to increase food security, teach climate-smart practices, reduce deforestation, and stabilize incomes.**

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## Zeitz Foundation

DONATION: \$100,000

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Our donation allowed the Zeitz Foundation (ZF) to implement its Tree of Life Initiative in Laikipia, Kenya. Since the program started, ZF has built a tree nursery, drilled a borehole for irrigation, germinated and planted 250,000 seedlings, and developed an arborist vocational training program for women.

The Tree of Life initiative combines ZF's women's education and vocational training objectives with their reforestation, conservation, and biodiversity efforts. In so doing, ZF offers women an opportunity for independent incomes and financial freedom while ultimately reforesting over 1,000,000 acacia trees (starting with 250,000 by 2021)—regenerating the landscape, enhancing soil stabilization and fertility, recapturing water, and ensuring the survival of a biodiverse ecosystem.

Since ZF received our funding in 2019, they created a nursery, sourced 100,000 high-quality seedlings from the Kenya Forestry Research Institute, and prepared a rhino-shaped area for planting in a 50,000-acre wildlife refuge in the heart of Laikipia, Kenya. Earlier this spring, 55 members of the local villages were trained in planting techniques and—with help from ZF's All Women Anti-Poaching Rangers—had all 100,000 trees planted by the end of May.

Since then, ZF has created new water access, prepared a seedbed nursey, germinated an additional 150,000 acacia seedlings, and—with the help of 17 local women—started its second phase of planting. Over the next few months, they will fit the borehole with a solar pump, panels, and other plumbing works to start generating up to 40,000 liters of water a day.

Because of COVID-19, ZF delayed the launch of their Vocational Training Academy for Forestry and Permaculture until January 2021, but they continue to develop the curriculum. Once they can open safely, ZF will hold multiple one-week courses for 20 local trainees at a time.

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**The Zeitz Foundation develops and implements ecologically responsible projects in the Greater Segera Region of Kenya.**

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# Agros International

**DONATION: \$150,000**

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Our donation helped Agros provide 97 subsistence farmers (more than 500 beneficiaries) in the three villages of Matagalpa, Nicaragua, with training on climate-smart agriculture practices. Since the start of the project, 63 of those families have shifted the way they see agriculture production, increased their crop yields and household incomes, decreased their use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and adopted water-conserving irrigation systems.

Matagalpa is a region highly sensitive to extreme weather, where hurricanes, excessive rainfall, and drought often lead to crop losses, financial hardship, and an ongoing cycle of poverty. Agros is committed to providing these farmers with the tools and infrastructure needed to reduce their vulnerability to the environment and any future economic stresses.

As of August 2020, Agros had established a vermicompost production and training facility (which has produced more than 50 tons of compost and 20,000 pounds of biofertilizers), created a nursery, produced 41,000 seedlings, built a water irrigation system, and installed a hydroponic module. As a result, families have seen the number of harvests increase from one to three—improving their crop yields by 18 percent and their household incomes by 15 percent. In addition, thanks to 97 families participating in the vermicompost workshop, the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides is down 40 percent in the area, while pest incidence is down 50 percent.

In response to COVID-19, Agros identified the most vulnerable families in the program and supplied them with an emergency hygiene, food, and agricultural package and provided training and washing stations to prevent the spread of the virus.

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**Agros International works to break the cycle of poverty for farming families in rural Latin America.**

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**Project Concern International provides communities in the developing world with the tools to lift themselves out of poverty and contribute less to climate change.**

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**The Rainforest Alliance works with rural communities in more than 60 countries to conserve forests and support sustainable livelihoods.**

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## **Project Concern International**

**DONATION: \$150,000**

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Our donation helped Project Concern International (PCI, a Global Communities Partner) implement their “Carbon Capture” initiative to distribute firewood-saving stoves, start reforestation activities, and improve sanitation for rural families in the Western Highlands region of Guatemala.

In February, to start the program and guide their efforts, PCI surveyed 308 households, or roughly 1,600 people in Huehuetenango, Guatemala. Their key findings: only 18 percent of the families used firewood-saving stoves, 35 percent did not have a latrine, and most obtained their water by harvesting and boiling rainwater using firewood. As a result, in addition to starting reforestation efforts, PCI focused on providing water-purifying filters, eco latrines, and clean-burning, fuel-efficient stoves to many of these highly vulnerable households.

Despite COVID-19 shutting down community activities and restricting access to the area for months, PCI reached every household in the community and gave them the tools to help fight climate change. As a result, 168 new latrines were constructed, 252 families have climate-smart cookstoves, 306 use safe, eco-friendly water filters, and 10,000 trees were reforested. Taken together, these initiatives will alleviate the health issues associated with cooking and sleeping in the same room, end the destruction of 3,500 trees each year for firewood, prevent the spread of waterborne diseases that cause malnutrition and stunting in children, and create a renewable source of fuel. Another benefit: Women and girls will now be able to focus on school rather than collecting firewood.

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## **Rainforest Alliance**

**DONATION: \$50,000**

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Our donation helped the Rainforest Alliance (RA) expand their reforestation program in Ghana. Over the past year, RA helped farmers increase their cocoa capacity (without the typical deforestation) through trainings and workshops, established five tree nursery sites, and produced over 84,000 seedlings—double their original projection.

RA focuses on the deforestation in Ghana, which is mainly caused by unsustainable cocoa production. They help conserve the cocoa forest landscape, increase the cocoa yield, and sustain the farming livelihoods of communities by teaching climate-smart practices and empowering the farmers to be responsible for managing the landscapes and restoring deforested areas.

In early 2020, RA identified 4,000 hectares of land for restoration under threat from farm expansion, climate change, and tourism; established four nursery sites; produced 60,000 seedlings; provided 2,584 farmers with climate-smart tools and techniques; and trained 44 members of local Landscape Management Boards—half of them women—in nursery management.

By early summer, RA established a fifth nursery site and germinated an additional 20,000 seedlings to support the Ghana Cocoa Board’s goal of replacing all cocoa trees infected with disease. COVID-19 restricted their ability to hold trainings, as the government partially locked down this area. But RA communicated using online technologies (if internet access was available) or broadcasting audio recordings over the public speaker systems in many villages and rural areas.

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## Citizens’ Climate Education

DONATION: \$50,000

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Our donation helped Citizens’ Climate Education (CCE) strengthen their nationwide coalition of climate advocates, create a powerful counterweight to paid lobbyists advocating for the fossil fuel industry, and educate policymakers and the public about smart solutions to climate change.

CCE empowers people to advocate for effective and sustainable climate solutions at the grassroots level. Their volunteers build relationships that purposely bridge the partisan divide. They’re organized into 466 chapters across the US and 102 chapters in 33 countries. In the US, CCE-trained volunteers lobbied to build bipartisan support for the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act (H.R.763) and supported the launch of the bipartisan Climate Solutions Caucus in the Senate.

In the last year, CCE held 4,773 local outreach events, added 76,000 new members (a 72 percent increase), launched 64 new chapters, held an all-virtual international climate conference, and won the Keeling Curve Prize. Their volunteers collected almost 100,000 constituent letters to hand-deliver to Congress and held over 1,700 in-person meetings with congressional officers.

The key to CCE’s success: the belief that strong, vibrant communities have the power to reduce carbon emissions more than anyone else.



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**Citizens’ Climate Education is an advocacy organization that educates policymakers and the public about smart solutions to climate change.**

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**Rainforest Action Network works to preserve forests, protect the climate, and uphold human rights by challenging corporate power and systemic injustice.**

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**Bread for the World is an advocacy organization working to end hunger at home and abroad.**

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## **Rainforest Action Network**

**DONATION: \$50,000**

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Our donation supported the efforts of the Rainforest Action Network (RAN) in Sumatra, Indonesia, where they worked to make corporations accountable for their supply chains. RAN’s mission is to raise awareness of illegal deforestation and the clearance of the associated peatlands while helping protect Indigenous people from human rights abuses and violence stemming from these illegal land grabs.

RAN is committed to saving the rainforests. Rainforests help prevent global warming by absorbing the greenhouse gases that would otherwise be released into the atmosphere while providing the moisture to maintain a constant level of global rainfall. They also provide a biodiverse habitat for countless animal and plant species.

Over the last year, RAN has successfully pressured some corporations to adopt and implement “No Deforestation, No Peatland, and No Exploitation” commitments, while exposing others that are expanding into intact forests. Just recently, because of the constant exposure by RAN, two palm oil companies worked with Indonesian organizations and local governments to create a sanctuary for Sumatran rhinos.

RAN also works hard to keep global brands responsible in their practices. For example, they rank companies on how well—or how poorly—they fulfill their deforestation promises (which resulted in Kellogg’s issuing a revised palm oil and deforestation policy). And they secured a palm oil sourcing policy from PepsiCo, Inc. which pledges that their supply chain will no longer include any deforestation, peatland destruction, or human/labor rights abuses.

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## **Bread for the World**

**DONATION: \$200,000**

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Our donation helped Bread for the World (Bread) scale up their efforts to explain to Congress how climate change contributes to more hunger, which in turn makes our world less stable.

In 2020, Bread focused on creating a set of principles to guide their climate-related work and communications going forward. Through a mapping exercise, Bread finalized their policy/legislation niche and drafted their essential message: Slowing and stopping climate change is an essential—and sustainable—component of ending hunger. To Bread, that will mean advocating for universal access to the climate-smart agriculture tools and social protections that create food security by supporting policies that:

- Provide support to people facing shocks such as natural disasters
- Acknowledge climate change as a push factor for migration
- Preserve and prevent further loss of biodiversity
- Put the US on track to ending hunger and malnutrition
- Prioritize racial, gender, and class equity while promoting climate justice

Due to COVID-19, Bread’s plans to identify a climate-specific community from their base was put on hold, but they continue to expand their outreach through social media and webinars. In addition, they signed on to the NGO Climate Compact: Commitments toward Environmental Action and Sustainability 2020-2022 pledge (led by InterAction) and will soon release a paper presenting evidence that climate change has a significant impact on hunger in the US and around the world.