



Response to Article in *Business Week*, November 2009

This is written as a response to the inaccuracies of the *Business Week* magazine article published around November 28, 2009. The article was written by Jessica Silver-Greenberg of *Business Week* and was supported by International Reporting Project.

It was with great interest that I spoke with Jessica Silver-Greenberg, of *Business Week* Magazine, a few weeks ago about doing a story regarding my company, Dominion Farms, in Kenya. She asked many questions and I poured out answers to her about the farm and our overall plans for development in Kenya. I forwarded many internal documents and there was an excitement about the coming article. Arrangements were made for *Business Week* photographers to come to Guthrie, Oklahoma, to visit our company's main office. Also, plans were discussed to bring a crew to Kenya to document a comprehensive view of what we are doing on the farm. The photographers came to Oklahoma for 6 hours of photos, and spoke of their disappointment that *Business Week* was hiring a different crew for filming in Kenya.

Then suddenly plans changed and the story was set to run without a visit to the farm by either the journalist or a photographer. I offered to send pictures but Ms. Silver-Greenberg declined. I was displeased that the magazine had rejected the invitation to see our business for themselves but was advised by Ms. Silver-Greenberg that her research was complete. While publication of a flawed article is out of my hands, my response to its deficiencies in telling the full story of my business - and life's work - is not.

The story was posted to the internet on Thanksgiving Day and I was probably among the first to read it. My heart sank as I tried to understand how a senior journalist for *Business Week* chose not to use this opportunity to cover a revolutionary way of doing business in Africa that combines Western agribusiness practices to employ hundreds of locals and feed thousands throughout the country. Instead, she used this respected business magazine as a platform to promote a misguided social agenda. This could have been a stepping stone for the media to explore a new social business model. Instead, the piece was written as an outsider, and left out the majority of my personal statements and insights. My disappointment in the inaccuracy of the article has brought me here today to share with interested parties the truth of Dominion Farms.

There was one point the journalist made in the article with which I agree, that doing business in Africa is a struggle. It is a struggle that has become my life's mission. Much of Africa has endured extreme poverty during the past century. My mission is about bringing the people of Kenya out of that poverty by helping to build their economy by producing and distributing as much rice as possible and by demonstrating a reproducible agricultural model. Such major changes come with difficulties along the way.

The journalist chose to write her story from a very small perspective. If this is the only view one has into how changes can be made in Africa, then I believe Ms. Silver-Greenberg has done a great injustice to the people she hoped to help. By slandering a business that is doing good for a community, other potential investors who can change the lives of Africans will be deterred. I would like to take this opportunity to tell what CAN be done in Africa through describing what Dominion Farms HAS ACTUALLY DONE.

If the journalist would have come to farm to take pictures and interview the workers on site, the story would likely have been entirely different. She would have found that the farm is not at all near the home of President Obama's grandmother and his brother, Malik. She might have checked out the story of the "arrested cattle" and found that their owner was arrested and the cattle were impounded by the Administration Police. A judge ordered them held for payment of damages incurred when the man cut down and destroyed thousands of dollars worth of fences and deliberately ran his cattle into the rice fields - despite having previously been warned by the court for similar offences. Dominion Farms has no arresting authority.

The journalist wrote of how we displaced hundreds of families from the land. A good journalist would have done a bit of research and discovered that the only dry land was already occupied by a government agency while the remainder was a meter deep in water. By the time we took possession of the property, the temporary dikes had failed and the entire site was inundated. The swamp contained not a single home. In regards to the property purchased by Dominion Farms around the water storage reservoir, a thorough journalist would have researched the county registrar's office and found that the exact number of owners were 94. They could have reviewed the terms of purchase that were negotiated by the local government and could have seen photos of the celebration the people had at the time of payment. It is true that a few did not take the money for their land but it is still held in trust for them. A good journalist would have found out the reason for this acquisition - discovering that the Ministry of Water demanded that more irrigation water be stored, as it is the sole water reservoir in an area with regular droughts and crop failures.

If the journalist had actually come to the area around our farm and had become sick, as many locals and visitors do, she would have been taken to the local clinic and tested in the lab which Dominion Farms built, using the water which Dominion pipes there, examined under the lighting systems which Dominion installed, and powered by the electricity that Dominion provides to the clinic at no cost. Had she had been bitten by one of the deadly black mambas or vipers common to the area, her life would have been saved by the only anti-venom meds within eighty kilometers that we provide free to surrounding communities. But Ms. Silver-Greenberg did not come.

If the journalist had visited the area she may have enjoyed a local soccer match on one of the fields built by Dominion, or seen kids studying in classrooms built by Dominion for two local schools.

On the premises of the farm itself are 30,000 square feet of buildings nearing completion to train the youth of Kenya. Dominion Children's Foundation, a 501(c)(3) non-profit foundation established by Dominion Farms is teaching youth how to become self-sufficient with agricultural and other life skills to align with the company mission to truly serve the needs of the Kenyan people. These structures cannot be missed during a visit as they line the main entrance to the farm. For curious journalists unable to visit the farm, they are even prominent on satellite photo images available on Google Earth. But Ms. Silver-Greenberg did not appear to be particularly curious.

A journalist who was physically present would have observed over 20 kilometers of dikes we have constructed to divert the river and control flooding in the area. She may have seen a half-acre garden being destroyed as reported in her article. It was planted on the side of a major dike and its cultivation weakened the whole flood control system. The same would have occurred in the United States if someone had plowed an area along the flood dikes of the Mississippi River.

The journalist wrote of how we employ so few people but she relied on someone else for that information. Dominion currently employs between 600-700 people, approximately 350 of which are permanent employees while the others are casual workers who perform seasonal field work as needed. Since coming to Kenya, Dominion Farms has paid over 7 million US Dollars for labor in Kenya. Our permanent farm workers are represented by a labor union and are among the highest paid farm workers in the country. The casual workers' pay rate is set by the Ministry of Labor and they are paid accordingly.

The article addressed flooding during the severe rains of 2007 and blamed the dam constructed by Dominion Farms. A good journalist may have checked official rainfall records and discovered the entire truth. In 2007 Dominion lost over a thousand acres of crops to flooding. Rivers overflowed their banks everywhere in the country, roads washed away and many lives were lost. During this dreadful period Dominion emptied our grain silos and gave away tons of grains to the communities. If the journalist had visited the farm, she would have seen the dam sitting there with the flood gates permanently wide open, unable to be closed because they have never been connected to the hydraulic power supply. Because the river freely flows over the open weir, Dominion had and still has no ability to flood anyone's land - not even our own.

The journalist reported the quality of the river water as being tainted by pesticides but she neglected to review the Government Water Officer's reports to see the quarterly reports filed there. The water in the Yala River is far from perfect but it is all that is there. It is what all of our employees, including myself, use daily. Dominion Farms has constructed settlement basins, filtration structures and improved the water as much as possible, but more is still to be done. The report the journalist referred to regarding children has the reader thinking that Dominion Farms put it there. Dominion Farms does not use this nor would we ever put it in our own drinking water.

If the journalist had researched the matter of pesticide use, she would have found that the United Nations coordinates a pest eradication program with the Government of Kenya for the control of locust and quelea birds throughout the country. These pests destroy thousands of tons of food crops annually in Kenya. Quelea birds arrive in flocks of as many as a million birds and wipe out everyone's crops - not just ours. If the journalist had come to the farm she may have seen a Beaver Aircraft there clearly marked and flown by a Kenyan government pilot (sometimes accompanied by the Ministry of Agriculture) eradicating pests in the area. Dominion allows the government to freely utilize our landing strip. This plane covers much of East Africa to help assure stable food supplies to the area.

The journalist wrote about my time spent preaching in churches. It is true I speak boldly at churches, schools, soccer games, and about any other place I find myself in Kenya. I plead with the people to change from customs and traditions that are literally killing them. The incidence of HIV/AIDS is 14% in the Province and 30% around the farm. Clearly their traditions must change or perish. Once a person has held a dying baby in their arms or witnessed a child starving to death, their life will never be the same. I will do everything in my capacity to promote changes in this destructive behavior. I will continue to preach these messages as long and as frequently as I can.

What I have written here was communicated to Ms. Silver-Greenberg before she penned her story, yet she chose to ignore it. If the story was conceived around an activist agenda, then it is understandable why no one visited the farm to see the true work being accomplished there. The story was never about the struggle of business in Africa but about advancing a biased social agenda. If she had visited the farm, the photos would not fit the story that she intended to sell. Just a little research would have uncovered our cooperation and relationships with such organizations as the UN Millennium Goals, The World Economic Forum, FAO, the Kenya Ministries of Fisheries and Agriculture and many others working hard on the ground for the betterment of the people of Kenya. I hope it was not her mission to discredit me and to discourage others from investing in Africa - but I fear she may have accomplished just that.

Dominion Farms in Kenya is not only my business, it is my entire life's work. The article and my response give a brief glimpse into the struggle that we have encountered along the way. But this project is bigger than the struggles. Every aspect of our mission is to better the lives of Kenyans. As jobs are the most direct way to stimulate the economy, we employ hundreds on our farm. We also promote new small businesses by selling our rice to vendors and by setting up kiosks for them. Through updating local schools and a clinic, we contribute to the lives of the people neighboring the farm. By establishing a non-profit foundation to work closely with the business, using Dominion Farms as a learning tool, we are committed to the development of a better life for the youth of Kenya so that one day Kenya will be a self-sustaining economy.

While Dominion Farms is honored that *Business Week* saw our company as a global front runner in doing business in Africa, we are disheartened by the lack of commitment to our true story. It is my hope that this response will shed real light on what investing in Africa is all about.

Calvin Burgess, CEO
Dominion Farms Ltd.