



**Constant Ngouala**

**Plant It Forward Farm - Houston, TX**

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Evan Stern: Today is April 3rd, 2025, and we're recording at the Plant it Forward Farm on Fondren Road in Houston, Texas. We're speaking today with Constant Ngouala. To begin, could you tell us your name and occupation?

Constant Ngouala: My name is Edith, first name; middle name, Constant; last name, Ngouala. I'm a farmer, a master farmer. I'm working with Plant it Forward, like, an independent farmer. We start a program.

Evan Stern: What does master farmer mean?

Constant Ngouala: A master farmer is a farmer that is able to give training to other farmers, yeah, the one that have enough knowledge that you can teach to other farmers.

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Evan Stern: Can you, first, describe for me your childhood home, and tell me about where you're from?

Constant Ngouala: I come from Congo-Brazzaville and Congo-Kinshasa because my mom is from Congo-Kinshasa, and my dad from Congo-Brazzaville. But I born in Congo-Brazzaville, grew up in Congo-Brazzaville, and I left my country in 2020-- 2099 [sic] because the war that start on 2000-- no-- in 1999, because of the war that start in Brazzaville in 1997. I was studying in a university. I left Brazzaville. I go back where I grew up in Dolisie. When I was over there, I notified people that was coming to my house to ask for fertilizer. I asked my mom. My mom told me, "That is your little brother. He used to go to buy that to Pointe-Noire, and come to sell to

people here." When I go to Pointe-Noire, I ask my little brother, "Show me where you were buying that?" I start buying and coming.

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That one led me to start to get the training for agriculture.

Evan Stern: But what did you wanna be when you grew up? What did you wanna be?

Constant Ngouala: My goal was to be a mechanical engineer. My dad was looking for me to be a farmer, to study for agriculture. But [laughter] when I'm doing agriculture today, I see that's like my dad dreaming, that he was dreaming for me that I'm doing.

Evan Stern: So, were you studying engineering in college when the war broke out? Is that correct?

Constant Ngouala: Yeah. I get high school from the vocational high school and, because in my country, you don't have a big school where you can go to study for engineering, I go to study for economics.

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Evan Stern: Can you tell us about the conflict that happened? What was going on with the war that happened?

Constant Ngouala: Before 1990, Congo had one political party. Then after 1990, the Congolese people asked to go to the democracy, and we elected Pascal Lissouba as the president, the first one. After five years, when he was going to the end of his mandate, the former president came back with a weapon to fight and take power by force. That one bring us to leave the

country, because after when he get the power, he start going to a place where people who was near Pascal Lissouba was living. He was killing people.

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That's when we left the country.

Evan Stern: Were you personally in danger?

Constant Ngouala: Yeah, because when I was in Brazzaville, I have a student, and he was around the political party for Pascal Lissouba. I was in the genesis of the youth parties, the Pascal Lissouba political party. When we come to [inaudible 0:04:29] people that was in the new-- people that the former president get, like with the military, the youth, they know us who in the Pascal Lissouba political party. They start making trouble to people. That's when we left the country.

Evan Stern: You fled to Gabon. Is that correct?

Constant Ngouala: Yeah.

Evan Stern: Can you tell me about how you got to Gabon? Can you tell me about that journey?

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Constant Ngouala: That was in January 25, that was Monday, January 25 in 1990. The war start in Dolisie. The people come, attack Dolisie, and we escape. We go to the village around Dolisie. Over there, there was no security. They was killing people. We walk from Dolisie to one big, smaller town, Vanda. Over there, some friend was living in the same neighborhood, and they say, "You cannot stay here. Prefer to go to Gabon," because their mom was working in Gabon.

When you listen that we was in that village, they say, "No. Ask them to come here", and we go over there.

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All the people that were left, they-- and was like in May. The president send again the helicopter to come to bomb people from that village. That when many people go to Gabon, and was, I think, that was in June. We make the first declaration for the-- I guess for refugees, come over there, send people-- no [inaudible 0:06:26]. Come over there with many channel. They come to make an interview and make a declaration for [inaudible 0:06:35] declaration that let everyone in the world to know that the people is fighting in Congo, and there is many refugees in Gabon. That declaration bring people to know that there is many refugees in Gabon, and they started giving us some assistance over there.

Evan Stern: What was life for you like as a refugee in Gabon?

Constant Ngouala: That was not easy, not easy.

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First, they didn't put us in the camp because, for the truth the governor, president was married to the Congolese, that president that [inaudible 0:07:15] left the country, daughter. That was not easy for us. When we do-- like me, I was in the university. When we tried to go to study in university, they say, "You cannot go to university." They didn't let us go, and they didn't give us a place to stay. Everyone was renting their place to stay, and that's not easy. That's not easy. Many people suffered over there, even they were giving us some assistance from the refugee agency. But for the rent, we suffered a lot.

Evan Stern: They wouldn't allow you to work, is that correct, as well?

Constant Ngouala: Yeah, we cannot work because we didn't have a paper. They have the paper.

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Maybe after maybe eight years that they start people-- letting people to work. But, for me, when I get to that city, I see nobody was farming. Like, I farm. I start making some vegetables over there that let me to survive in Gabon.

Evan Stern: Then what do you-- so, you discover farming while you're in Gabon. Can you tell me-- talk about how that happened and how you started farming in Gabon?

Constant Ngouala: In Africa, that's not like here. I had only a shovel and something to cut the grass, and I start to cutting with my shovel. That technique, I use that even here. Even when I'm working with a tractor, I use my shovel to start making my bed. That's what I was doing over there. The seed, I have one businessman from West Africa, who was going to Libreville to buy his goat.

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I was giving him money to buy my seed, and he bring my seed. After that, when I start selling and I start going to Libreville, sometimes I go to buy my stuff by myself.

Evan Stern: What did you grow in Gabon?

Constant Ngouala: I grow everything, almost the same I'm growing here: cabbage, tomato, eggplant, carrot. Almost the same, but we don't have broccoli because people don't like cauliflower, you know, lettuce, everything we grow that over there.

Evan Stern: Can you tell us about the process you had to go through in order to migrate to the United States?

Constant Ngouala: First, they come to identify us. We received one agency, American Agency for Immigration.

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They come over there. They come to talk to the refugees. After that, we work with demand from the embassy. I'm the one who got to drop that demand to the ambassador. That was in May 23, 2004. After two weeks, we received a political consul from the embassy. He came to our city, and we asked him a question. "We came to your embassy to drop a demand for us because we cannot go to school." "My presence here is the answer for your demand." That's when they start the process for bringing people here.

Evan Stern: How long did that process take?

Constant Ngouala: That depends. Someone, first, they come to identify. After that, they send another agency [inaudible 0:10:58].

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After that, they send immigration, the Office of Immigration from the United-- that can take around one year, one year, more.

Evan Stern: You discover that you're moving to Houston. Do you know how or why Houston was chosen as your destination?

Constant Ngouala: No, I didn't know because before to come, my wife and my kids had this family that come before us. We were thinking of coming to the same destination as them. But

when we get to the Libreville Airport, I see on the ticket, Chicago. But when we go to the airplane we transit, and we're going to Houston. I had never known about Houston before getting to Houston.

Evan Stern: What were your first impressions of Houston? What did you think of Houston at first when you got here?

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Constant Ngouala: First, when they told me I'm going to Texas, I was happy because, in my country, we know that Texas is a place where there is many farmers. For me, I said, I will farm one day in Texas. That was very good for me. But when we get to Houston, that's not so easy because I had never speak English in my life. When you get here [laughter], when people talk in English, I have a headache, and that's a big problem for us, the shock of culture. The language was very difficult, and many things, like, we get here by March. You see that is standing on Mars, but that's very cold. In my country, it's not like that. When that is a sunny day, that's not cold. But here, sunny day, when working outside, that was very cold for me.

Evan Stern: What else can you tell us about your first day in Houston?

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Constant Ngouala: The first day when we get here, in the airport, that was a Catholic charity send somebody to come to get us, and they bring us to the house that they prepare for us. We had everything over there. The first day, we eat, we sleep, because the trip was very long. After two days, the Catholic charity come to us, and take us to, bring us to Social Security to go to apply for Social Security or permit. They bring us back, and already they come to get us to bring us to the first step to go to apply for the first step.

Evan Stern: But what was your first-- you said you didn't speak English when you first got here. What was your first job? 'Cause you were required to go to work very soon. Where did you first work and what was that like?

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Constant Ngouala: When I get here, we don't work at-- when you get-- I work maybe eight months later. Because when I come, the Catholic charity didn't bring me to study English. They didn't bring me to do my-- to learn to drive. That was very difficult for me. I met one brother, who was living in the same complex as me. He was passing one day. He see my nephew. He talk to him. He understand that my nephew don't speak English. He said, "What language do you speak?" He said, "I speak French." "Where are you from?" "I come from Congo-Brazzaville." "Oh," he said, "me too, I'm from Congo-Brazzaville." He come to us, and we start taking. He say to me, "Now I'm studying, I'm going to ACC, and I'm doing my ESL. After that, I will get my degree plan, and I will continue my school." I said, "I'm interested to go to study too." That one Friday, he bring me over there. He go.

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I apply for school. They asked me to go to make my test. I get my test. Even I don't speak, but in the school writing, I did like 65 let me to start in Level 1. I start my ESL for-- I do four semesters, from the first one to the last. I finish my ESL, and I start my degree plan that was mechanical engineering. But I stopped because when I come to start doing the farming, I see, when I go into school, I know if I finish my degree, I will be-- how much I will be making? If I farm, I will be-- I don't-- first, I don't have a-- you don't have to take a lot of money for the loan. I prefer farming because farming can let me be good in America that one of farming.

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Evan Stern: How and when did you discover-- how and when did you learn about Plant it Forward?

Constant Ngouala: Plant it Forward, that was in 2012. Before that, in 2011, I went to West Belfort. Before I cross over there, I see one farm. I go to see those people. I say, "I need to start farming, but I don't know how to start." They send me to Urban Harvest. When I go to Urban Harvest, they took all information about me. They go to show me one community farm that they have in Alabama. They tell me about the Westbury community farm, garden, but I didn't find this one. Then they ask me to wait for them.

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We'll see if we can get the land. We start the farm for our community. When I was waiting, somebody told me about Teresa, who started helping the refugees to start farming, and I go to the first meeting that was in that church, Braeswood. When I get over there, I bring the photos, everything that I have got, like, proof that I was farming from Africa. When Teresa see that, "I very interested in you. If you know people who want to farm," I say, "I have some friends that need to farm." At the next meeting, when I come, I bring three more people, and we start a program.

Evan Stern: Wonderful. Just to clarify, too, I asked, did you-- what jobs did you work, though, before farming here in Houston?

Constant Ngouala: Before farming, I started working first in UPA...UPD.

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That was one manufacturer that make plastic parts for air conditioning, everything. That was in the north side. When they give us a lay-off over there, then I come back to school. After three months, I go to apply for Goodman. I work in Goodman for six months. They give a lay-off, too. When I finish my Level 2, I had really good English. I go to make the training for a security officer. When I finish, I was working as a security officer. When the [inaudible 0:18:35] start, I was working like a security officer. After that, Teresa say to me if I can be working with them like a manager. "Yeah," I said, "no problem," and I started working at it.

Evan Stern: Excellent. So, what was the first-- I know you said you went to the first meeting. What was your first harvest like?

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Can you tell me about that process, what your first growing season here with Plant it Forward was like?

Constant Ngouala: That was-- it start-- that was in fall. We start harvesting in fall. But, you know, the thing is the same, the same way that we work in Africa, but the difference is the season. Some seasons, we cannot plant the stuff here. That one make a little bit different, but that was the same. When we come, like, for the lettuce, we didn't make the lettuce mix in our country. We plant the big one, and we sell the head. But here, they teach us how to make the salad mix. However, that one, when harvesting, we go to the warehouse that is in Willowbend, this way. We go over there. We clean two types, like, the lettuce arugula, the salad one. We clean that three times. We put that in the dryer machine, and we spread it on the table. We start making the bags to bring to the market.

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Evan Stern: Then you begin selling at the Urban Harvest Market. Can you tell me about what that first market day was like for you?

Constant Ngouala: Oh, that was very amazing, because the first time to go to sell in the market in America, that was very interesting, because we used to do that in Africa. But that is a little bit different, not the same way that we sell in Africa. But that was very good. I think that was in November 2012. From that date until today, every Saturday, I'm in the market.

Evan Stern: Why is it important for you to be at the market in person every Saturday?

Constant Ngouala: That's important for me because when I go to a farmers market, some customers need to talk with the farmer of that plant. That gives them more confidence to believe that that one is from him, when you explain why we do that.

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Over there, too, I meet many chefs. Many people do that who don't like to cook some vegetables. When they come, they ask for me, I tell them. Some vegetables that we have in Africa, that people don't have here, that we use like medicine, when people come, I can explain, "This one, we use that before this one, this one, this one. That's very important." When people-- many customers like to listen to you, saying there's something about what you are selling. For me, that's very important to be to a market.

Evan Stern: Do you have any favorite customers or favorite memories of customers?

Constant Ngouala: I have one lady from Magdalla, from India. That lady, during COVID, even that was difficult to sell. Every single week, she was order for me. She said, "I need that. Bring me that one."

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Every Sunday, if she's in Houston, she comes to my farm, the farm market.

Evan Stern: You said, too, that it's very different than the markets in Africa. What would you say are the different...how is the Urban Harvest Market different from the markets you grew up with?

Constant Ngouala: In Africa, that is very open. When we go to a market, that is the only way they like the shirt, when you come, we sell over there. The way that we put our stuff on the table, that's very different.

Evan Stern: So, tell me about this plot of land where we are right now. Who owns it, and what is the arrangement that you have to farm this land?

Constant Ngouala: This one is for the church, Braeswood church. That land, the first land that planted, get to start the program. We start the program here. The space that I'm using today was the training farm.

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I think the arrangement, I think they pay like \$25 or \$50 a month. That's like a donation.

Evan Stern: The crops that you're growing here are sold at the farm. Can you explain to me how the program works with the different farmers who are farming this land here?

Constant Ngouala: Here, everyone is independent. The production is my production. They plant it, give us your land, and where I was-- where we pay the fee for where I was for electricity, water that used over there, and for you, no fee. Only for cleaning, the people that come to cut the grass, you have to pay-- every farmer here pays \$25 a month, and the water bill.

Evan Stern: How many farmers are currently working this land?

Constant Ngouala: We have three farmers: me, Constant. In the middle, that is Christine. She's from Congo-Brazzaville too. Over there, that's Bobilya. She's from Congo-Kinshasa.

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Evan Stern: Again, what all are you growing here right now?

Constant Ngouala: Now, I have a tomato, like, over there, you see my first tomato. Sorry, I will have some tomato in the market. That's the first tomato in Houston for this season. Over there, I have kale, collard green, fresh sorrel. Over there, I have cabbage coming, and carrots are over there.

Evan Stern: But I know you also have recently started leasing a farm of your own. Can you tell me about how you reached that point?

Constant Ngouala: Because, you see, according to the season, when you make a crop rotation, if you already plant many things here with small land, you cannot do a good rotation. That one, I was attending the market, the Baybrook Market on Sundays. I meet one man, who used to come to sell the yucca.

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I asked, "Why your yucca is small?" I say, "I don't understand." Say, "I need to come to see that." When I went over there, I go to see, I see she never cut the branch, because in Africa, we cut the branch to use the greens, like, cassava greens. When you cut that, all the nutrients don't go to the leaves, they stay on the roots, and the roots become big. When I did that– if I cut the branch, that will die. I said, "That no die, when I cut that." After two weeks, he said to me, "He was right,

because I see my yucca start coming a little bit big." That one, one day, he say to me, "Come cut again." When I go over there, he say to me, "See the property across my place, I buy it, but I'm renting that, if you can be interested." I say, "I need to come to see with my kids." I call my kids, their mama, they come to me, and I go to see over there. I say, "No, that's good," and I start going over there.

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When I start over there, the backyard was almost one acre, almost. But where I started ... that a lot. He told me, "I was farming, but I'm tired. I don't know if you can be interested to rent my place." I said, "No problem." That's how I started renting over there.

Evan Stern: So, that's entirely-- the farm in Santa Fe is entirely yours. Is that cor...I mean, I know you're renting it, but that is-- that's separate from Plant it Forward, correct?

Constant Ngouala: Yeah. That is separate from Plant it Forward.

Evan Stern: How many acres is-- where is that farm, and how many acres is it?

Constant Ngouala: That is a big land over there, but I'm using one and a half.

Evan Stern: So, you're farming one and a half acres out of like eight acres. Is that correct?

Constant Ngouala: Yeah.

Evan Stern: Why not more?

Constant Ngouala: Because I don't have enough equipment to do that. Over there, to get somebody who come to help you to work, that's not easy.

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That one you see now, I have many problems. Over there, I was planting a lot, but I didn't harvest like I was supposed to harvest. When you plant, after that, you get a lot of weed. You cannot control that weed. That's always a problem. That one I changed the way, you see. I wanna plant it with plastic. Over there, to start that, planting with plastic, I think that one will help me, because I plant a lot, but I didn't get enough money that I was supposed to get. That one, I changed the way, using the plastic.

Evan Stern: What are your monthly bills for that farm? How much do you have to pay in rent and utilities?

Constant Ngouala: Over there, the land is 1,000, and the place I'm living is 1,100. That is like 2,100.

Evan Stern: Your water bills and electricity?

Constant Ngouala: Over there, we have a well. We don't have billed water over there.

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Even the electricity, that don't take a lot.

Evan Stern: I know you must-- can you talk about-- tell us about the-- you must have a lot of monthly expenses, though, in terms of equipment.

Constant Ngouala: Yeah.

Evan Stern: So, how have your profits been with that farm?

Constant Ngouala: For now, I don't get a lot of profit because I'm paying for some equipment, some stuff I don't have enough money to buy. I'm paying a little bit, little bit. I think maybe in two years, I will be very stable. For now, that's not easy. That's not easy. I understand why many

people, when they start farming, they stop [laughter], I know. Because that's my passion, that why I know tomorrow will be good for me. For now, that's not easy.

Evan Stern: What would you like to be farming there?

Constant Ngouala: Please?

Evan Stern: What would you like to farm? What are you farming now on that land in Santa Fe?

Constant Ngouala: Almost the same stuff.

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Like here, I cannot plant stuff like sweet potatoes, peanuts, because there are many rats here. I plant that over there. Like over there, I cannot be planting stuff like cabbage, because I have many rabbits over there. Some stuff, I see, if I notice this vegetable, my rabbit is eating that, I skip that over there, and bring that in Houston. If I see that one over-- I skip that, and bring that over there. I plant almost the same stuff.

Evan Stern: But what would you like to crop? Would you like to plant fruit?

Constant Ngouala: Yeah.

Evan Stern: What would you like to be doing that you're not able to do now?

Constant Ngouala: Over there, I try the strawberries, organic strawberries. I make success with that. But I notice one thing that is very difficult to do that, I need to have many good equipment.

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I will start doing that because organic strawberry is not easy. I try that, that was a success, but that's not easy. That one, I'm planning to restart that again next year. But, for the fruit, I would like to plant the fruit like figs, loquats, because there's fruit you cannot see that in the market. That's not easy to see that in the market. But, for now, that is not my land. If I plant fruit, and if the contract say no, I can lose something. Actually my farm is actually my farm-- I will lose all that. If that was my own land, I can be planting a lot of fruit.

Evan Stern: Do you worry about losing your lease?

Constant Ngouala: That can happen one day because that's not my land. If you say no today, that can happen.

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For now, that's another question, but that can happen.

Evan Stern: Are you working to purchase land of your own?

Constant Ngouala: Yeah. The problem is, I need to work hard to get money, because if you go to the Agriculture Department to get the land, that land with the condition, I think that cannot work, because I don't like to get the land today. When I die, if my kids cannot be farming, they will lose that land. But if I get a good land, like, one or five acres with my own money, when I buy that, that becomes for me, no condition for somebody, I can do that.

Evan Stern: Is there anything that you grew in Africa that you wish you could grow here?

Constant Ngouala: Yeah, a lot. You see this one? This one is a yucca that I put in a crate.

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I'm planting that on there with plastic, because we eat a lot the greens, cassava greens. Most of the time, people bring that frozen from Africa from when I start to planting this one, when people eat that, they don't like to eat again the frozen one. But I don't have enough land to do that. That one, I'm trying to do. Plant it, they told me, "You can use your land for that, no problem, that one, or the back." You see where that man is cleaning? All that is yucca. When he cleans, that will come back. During the winter, I don't take the yucca, because my goal is the greens. I don't take the yucca. That means, when winter comes, the plant is dry, but the root stays. After that, that comes back. All that back is full of yucca. This one I'm planting, but that one is plastic.

Evan Stern: Is there anything that you grew in Africa that you can't grow here or that you miss growing?

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Constant Ngouala: Yeah, there's some fruit, like, African plum. That is a small fruit. We eat that. When you're eating fruit, you can eat that. You cannot grow that here. That one, too, if [laughter] you get that here, that's a lot of money.

Evan Stern: Is there anything that you grow here, like, that's more popular here than Afri...that you've had to learn how to grow?

Constant Ngouala: Here?

Evan Stern: Yes, like, stuff that we eat here, that's popular here, that isn't popular in Africa, that you've had to learn?

Constant Ngouala: Like strawberry?

Evan Stern: Yeah.

Constant Ngouala: Yeah, strawberry, you can't grow that very well in Africa, like, in Congo, because in 2013, Plant it sent me to Texas A&M to get the training for strawberries.

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I think that was Walmart who financed that project.

[Unrelated conversation]

Evan Stern: Could you describe for me what a typical day, workday is like for you? When do you get up, when do you go to bed, everything?

Constant Ngouala: I don't have a-- I work from Monday to Sunday. Sunday, I work from, like, 8 to 1 p.m. because I go to a church. My church starts at 3:00. When I come back, I go to sleep. Monday, from 6:30 I will start. Most of the time, I work nonstop. I can get a break for 30 minutes, and come again. I finish around 7:00, when the dark start come, and I can go to where I was prepare my stuff.

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I work every day.

Evan Stern: So, today are you going to-- how many days are you at the farm in Santa Fe? Where do you live, and where is the farm?

Constant Ngouala: The farm is across the way, the place I'm living. That's the same place.

Evan Stern: So, you live on the farm in Santa Fe?

Constant Ngouala: Yeah, in the farm.

Evan Stern: You live on the farm. How many days are you here at this farm?

Constant Ngouala: That depends. Like, over there, I have a lot to do over there. I do two days over there, and I come one day here to work like today. I work over there Tuesday, Wednesday. I was here Monday. Tuesday, Wednesday, over there. I come here today, and tomorrow I will be over there. Saturday, after the market, I will come here. Most of the time, when I finish over there, I have to come here of a night to open water.

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Evan Stern: Describe for me a typical market day for you. I know when I saw you at the market, you told me that you had just picked what you were selling at 1:00 a.m. that morning, which was really only a few hours before. So, tell me how that works.

Constant Ngouala: Harvest, I start to harvest Friday. Like, tomorrow, I will start to harvest over there. Like around 6:00, I put in the cooler, I come here, harvest, and I go to where I was in Willowbend. When I left that would be around 12 a.m. or 1 a.m, Saturday.

Evan Stern: So, you plant, you harvest at 12, 1 o'clock in the morning, and then you go to bed?

Constant Ngouala: Yeah.

Evan Stern: What time do you get up?

Constant Ngouala: By 5:00, I'll be outside come to the market.

Evan Stern: So, you come to the market, and you set up at 6 o'clock at the market. Is that right?

Constant Ngouala: Seven.

Evan Stern: Seven?

Constant Ngouala: Seven.

Evan Stern: How long is the market? The market ends, and then what happens after that?

Constant Ngouala: That starts at 7:00, and finish by noon.

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After that, I come. If I have some stuff left, I go to drop that first in the [working 0:37:07] cooler where I was, and I come here and work here. After working around 6:00, 7:00, I go back over there, I take the stuff, and I bring it back, because I have a small working cooler in my place. I go to put that over there. Sometimes I can have people that can ask me from over there, and I can give to them.

Evan Stern: What does your wife do? What can you tell us about your wife and children?

Constant Ngouala: I get married, I come with my wife and kids, we get divorced. I go back to Africa to marry a lady. I bring him [sic] here. When she gets here, after like five months, I go to the market, I come back home. He [sic] left me a letter. "Honey, I'm leaving because we call the police against me." Why you that? Because when she come, she was making trouble.

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Someday take a knife, and say, "I will kill you." I say, "Oh, you come to America to come to-- go to a jail?" That was very terrible. From that day, I don't know where she is in America. During COVID, she get here one week before COVID, and she left five months later. I don't know where she is.

Evan Stern: Where are your children?

Constant Ngouala: My children? My first one is at home. My first daughter, she get her bachelor degree in political science. She get her exam to go to law school. She will start in August. She is at home in Santa Fe. The second one living with her mom. She is in 11th grade. She is living [inaudible 0:38:46] Texas. The third one, too, is over there. She is in 6th grade. She's living with her mom, too.

Evan Stern: What do they think of having a farmer as a father? What do they think about farming?

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Constant Ngouala: They are very happy because during vacation, they are with me in the market. They come to sell with me in the market. They love it. Everyone in the market knows my kids. When they come, my customers, everybody people that sell in the market know my kids very well.

Evan Stern: What does it mean to you that your daughter is able to study to become a lawyer?

Constant Ngouala: That is very good for me because many kids, when they come here, when their parents get divorced, that's not easy for kids to be focused on school. For me, that's a chance. I praise God to give me that chance. My kids are very quiet. They like school. That's the thing, they cannot see to everyone who is getting divorced in this country.

Evan Stern: What are your hopes for the future? Where would you like to be in 10 years?

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Constant Ngouala: In 10 years, I think I need to be somewhere where I have my own land and many people working for me, because planting food is my passion because I know that is a good

way I can help people. Now, many people are eating fake food. That's not good for their health. That one, I'm happy because, like this year, last year, I had one customer who was coming to buy stuff from me. When I started, she was coming every time, every time. In December, she come to me and said to me, "Constant, you know I'm very happy for you because, from the start, eating your vegetables, that's very good. My son has cancer. But, now, they go to make a test to get a checkup again. They see now he's cancer-free. Your vegetables help us a lot."

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That was happy for me. That one, I need. If everyone can be focused to be eating the local one, mostly local one is a good food, because most of the people that will make local food, they eat that food themselves, and they take care for that. If people can be eating the local food, that will be very good for many people, because many food people say that's organic, people don't know the way that people do that. Like here, you see, my fertilizer. That leaves, when I collect that, I mix, mix, put with dirt. Then I break down, and put it on the bed. That is one I use mostly. Sometimes I add like a cottonseed meal.

Evan Stern: Right now, what do you think about America? What is your view of America?

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Constant Ngouala: America is a good place, a good place to live. There is a peace here. Comparing where I come from, you can-- now there is no war over there. But when you go in Congo, sometimes we say, what I come to do in this country? Because even you're driving on the street, the police officers stop you. They have to take your money. Many things over there. America cannot see that. That one is very good, America. America is a good place to live.

Evan Stern: What do you miss? Is there-- what do you miss about Africa?

Constant Ngouala: Oh, mostly my friends, only friends.

Evan Stern: But I know that, right now, there are a lot of people in this country who are afraid of refugees or afraid of immigrants. What do you say to that? What would you like for people to know about refugees and people in your position?

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Constant Ngouala: The refugees, when they come here, they can do many things that people don't do here, many good things. The problem is that when they come, if they can orientate them like us. If they can't do that, we're supposed to be doing the job that cannot help the people here. But when they show us how to start the farming here, and doing this thing that many people are happy now. The refugees are not the bad ones, or immigrants are not bad. But the problem is, when they come, if they can find a way to orientate them because, like here, many people don't have a farm. They need people that can work on the farm. Some go to work overseas to bring them to come to work on the farm here, getting a paper. Those people, when they come here, if they can orientate them to those jobs, that can be good.

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There is some good that you cannot see American people doing, like farming. Americans cannot go to accept to be working on the farm, like, one who goes to cut all the grass, doing a very small job. They cannot do that.

Evan Stern: You were talking about, you know, it's important to provide. I think what you're saying is that it's important to provide refugees with support and education.

Constant Ngouala: Mm-hmm.

Evan Stern: I know that's what you're doing here with the farmers. Why is it important for you to teach and share your knowledge with these others the way that you are doing?

Constant Ngouala: Because when they come here, they don't have the knowledge to do that. If I know how to show them the way, like I'm doing, that will help us, because you see in America, many food is coming overseas, outside. That money can be money that we can have in America. If many people are working here, planting here, we cannot go get the food outside, and we can be eating our own food.

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That one is secure. Then we won't go get it outside. Like I told last time, the food, when you harvest that, if that stays a long time, before to get where the people will eat that, that can get a lot of contamination. If you harvest today, and tomorrow that go to somebody, that don't pass through many hands. That one is more-- less than the contamination that one pass by many hands. That's when, I think, when the refugees come, if they can be farming, that's a good way to bring more food in America, for making good food in America.

Evan Stern: What is it important for you to teach your apprentices? What are the most important lessons you would like for them to learn?

Constant Ngouala: Like, how to start the nursery, that's very important. If you don't have a good nursery, you cannot have a plant. And how to prepare your bed.

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Constant Ngouala: How to take care for your vegetables because taking care, if you have a lot of weeds around your farm, that attracts many pests. If you have many pests, you cannot have a

good production. For us to do the organic one, you need to be managing weeds around to manage the pests. That one is very important when they start.

Evan Stern: Is there anything else that you would-- what is your favorite thing about farming?

Constant Ngouala: Favorite one is planting because when you plant, you get the vegetables. Planting, taking care for that. Going to the market, I know that I make money. If I don't have a plant and take care for my stuff to bring it to the market, I cannot get money. I have to start by planting first, and taking care.

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The market, somebody can be selling for me. That one is very important for me is being the farmer, planting, and taking care.

Evan Stern: I asked this-- I'm gonna ask-- I asked this question earlier. I'm gonna try to ask it in a different way. What would you like for people to know about refugees?

Constant Ngouala: The refugee is somebody who gets traumatized somewhere. They come not to seek for money; they come to seek for the peace. They are not so bad people. They can be helpful in the country, like me, like many of us who came here, who are doing-- some go to school. They get a degree. They serve America. Like my daughter, the one that I told you who get the bachelor degree in social-- political science, she's serving in the Army. She's in military, in Army. She's serving the country. That means refugee is not a problem. You see, refugee is a solution for something.

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If you don't have a lot of food, if you can get the refugees that want to farm, they can be farming, they will bring food to your table.

Evan Stern: Is there anything else that you would like to share?

Constant Ngouala: The thing that I need to share... that's the population. The population is supposed to be eating more local, to give us more energy, more strength to be farming more. Because sometimes when we plant, many people don't know the farmer market. Some stuff we plant, we don't sell. We had one customer who was buying good from us, the Stanford Bank. Now, with the President's decision to freeze subvention, the Stanford Bank too is getting a problem, and we'll be losing a lot of product.

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I'm very concerned for that.

Evan Stern: Well, Mr. Ngouala, thank you so much for speaking with us today. It's been a great honor.

Constant Ngouala: You're welcome. Thank you.

Evan Stern: Thank you.

[End]