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Cooperative Extension Professor Volunteers in Republic of Georgia



Justen Smith standing at the Republic of Georgia site of where the oldest human remains from 1.8 million years ago in Eurasia were discovered.

Justen Smith, Utah State University Cooperative Extension agriculture/4-H agent for Davis County, recently returned from a volunteer assignment to the Republic of Georgia, where he worked to address the shortage of agricultural machinery, a problem that limits production as well as long-term growth in Georgia's agricultural sector.

The trip was a project with CNFA, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to strengthening agricultural markets and empowering entrepreneurs in the developing world. Smith worked with CNFA staff in Georgia to develop the training components of the Access to Mechanization Project.

Smith has completed assignments in approximately 35 countries, where the focus has generally been on livestock or horticulture development, even if the necessary resources and equipment were lacking.

“This project finally brought about the realization that the equipment needs to be in place first to prepare the land to grow crops,” he said.

While in Georgia, Smith had the opportunity to interact with local farmers, who were enthusiastic, appreciative, showed legendary hospitality and asked a lot of questions, he said.

“While Extension Services have been available in the United States for more than 100 years, farmers in developing countries value these much-needed services because they are not readily available,” Smith said.

Yet, he said, farmers may be reluctant to change, even if they initially ask for help.

“Even if they know you are suggesting a better way of doing things, ensuring that they employ the advice is a big challenge,” Smith said. “The best way to address the issue is to identify farmers who seem progressive.

If producers demonstrate success based on recommendations, they can then encourage others to take up similar changes.”

Besides his love for other cultures, Smith is motivated to participate in volunteer work because he said he has been blessed with a good life and knowledge that he enjoys sharing with others who are in need.

“I feel rewarded when I witness the impact of this work on people who are struggling, but succeed to raise their incomes and better care for their families when they receive advice and guidance,” he said.

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