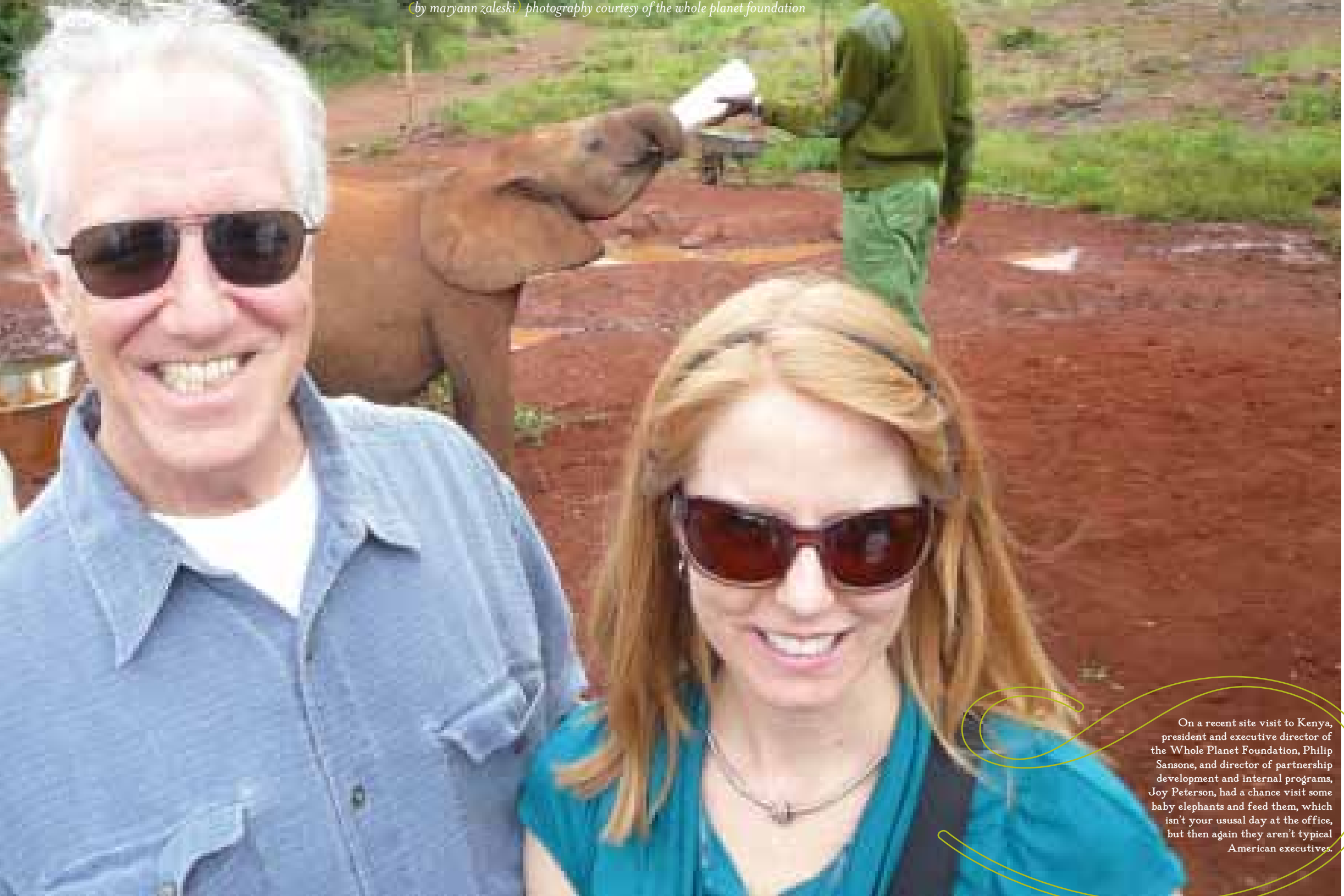




Whole Foods

How the *Whole Planet Foundation* is changing the world through conscious capitalism.

by maryann zaleski photography courtesy of the whole planet foundation

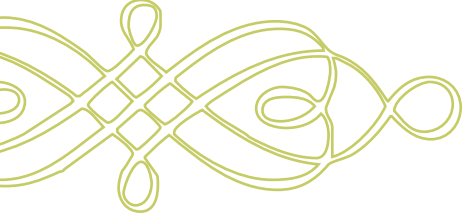


On a recent site visit to Kenya, president and executive director of the Whole Planet Foundation, Philip Sansone, and director of partnership development and internal programs, Joy Peterson, had a chance visit some baby elephants and feed them, which isn't your usual day at the office, but then again they aren't typical American executives.

From small beginnings, the world can be impacted. That is the core ideal of the beloved American underdog success story. It also accurately sums up *Whole Foods Market*, which started out with one small store in Austin, Texas. 30 years later, with over 270 stores in North America and the UK, the company is the world's leader in natural and organic foods. An American success story on many counts, *Whole Foods* stays true to its core values: selling the highest quality natural and organic products; satisfying and delighting customers; supporting team member happiness and excellence; creating wealth through profits and growth; creating win-win partnerships with suppliers; promoting the health of their stakeholder through healthy eating education ... but the one tenet that really caught our eye was "caring about our communities and our environment." *Whole Foods* does that in a big way.

The company began the non-profit *Whole Planet Foundation* in partnership with Professor Muhammad Yunus and Bangladesh's *Grameen Bank*, which he founded. Yunus is a pioneer of "microcredit." The idea is a simple one, provide small, no-collateral loans to the poor, and they become empowered to start or expand their businesses. In the professor's own words: "Microcredit ignites the tiny economic engines of the rejected underclass of society. Once a large number of tiny engines start working, the stage can be set for bigger things." That ultimate ripple effect concept won Yunus and the *Grameen Bank* The Nobel Peace Prize in 2006.

"Conscious Capitalism®," is the cornerstone of the program. "Helping global communities is an expansion of *Whole Foods Market's* mission and long history of being an active participant in our local and global communities," Sansone adds. "The creation of the *Whole Planet Foundation* directly connects *Whole Foods Market* customers and team members to the villages in developing countries that supply *Whole Foods Market* stores with products. Philip Sansone, president and executive director for *The Whole Planet Foundation* says, "Establishing these community partnerships contributes to the economic wellbeing of the communities where we



source products and the *Foundation* gives shoppers the opportunity to participate in the company's greater mission." *Whole Planet* currently has programs in 81 countries, supporting villages where the company sources products, such as coffee from East Timor, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Indonesia, Kenya and Nicaragua, bay leaf from Turkey, blueberries from Argentina, cacao from Bolivia, cashews and spices from India, bananas from communities in Costa Rica and Honduras, mangos from Haiti, rice from Thailand, onions from Peru, tea from Nepal, and locally, produce and dairy from the New York City area.

To talk the talk is one thing, but *Whole Foods*, which definitely walks the walk, sees the world as a global village. "When John [Mackey] first approached me about this idea, he said he wanted to help millions," Sansone reminisces. "I nearly choked at the audacity of the vision and goal, as I had been around development projects since 1971 and few, if ever, attain that lofty goal. Well, we are only four years from our first loan in 2006, and we'll soon be topping 400,000 beneficiaries and easily 500,000 by the end of 2010. I think we will reach our 1 million beneficiaries sometime in 2012. So, without a doubt, it will be millions within the next 5 years."

This year's annual "Prosperity Campaign" held in the spring at *Whole Foods* stores, yielded \$2.2 million from *Whole Food* shoppers and employees and is a testament to that goal. Sansone is quick to add, "We're so grateful for the continuous outpouring of support we receive from *Whole Foods Market* customers and team members. Since its inception, *Whole Planet Foundation* has disbursed through implementing partners \$7.1 million in loans. The average loan size is \$185 with an average repayment rate of 98 percent." *Whole Foods Market* covers all operational costs for the Foundation, which ensures that 100 percent of customer and employee donations go directly to fund microlending projects. *Whole Foods* also donates a percentage of the retail sale of all of its *Whole Trade Guarantee* products to the Foundation. To date, *Whole Foods Market* has contributed a combined \$3.5 million to the Foundation. It doesn't stop there; since the inception of its employee payroll deduction donation program in 2007, more than 15,100 *Whole Foods* team members from the U.S., Canada and the U.K. have contributed approximately \$1.4 million to the *Whole Planet Foundation*.

Whole Foods also offers programs where team Members and suppliers are able to visit the microcredit recipients as well as participate in community service activities. Joy Peterson, director of partnership development and internal programs at the Foundation, says, "We soon hope to include customers in our nascent *Whole Foods Market Team Member Volunteer Program* ... [The current program] includes a one-month stay, in the field, in Costa Rica and Guatemala where volunteers get to witness the impact of microcredit by meeting loan recipients and learning directly from them. Community service activities such as teaching literacy skills or building carbon efficient stoves are included. Since its inception, 89 team members have provided 72,500 meals to school children, distributed 15 tons of food, built 22 carbon-efficient stoves for families, taught 114,573 classroom hours, planted 6,490 trees, worked construction for 692 hours, and met 510 microcredit clients. This popular program has great results supporting communities where *Whole Foods Market* sources products." Peterson adds "Our *Supplier Alliance for Microcredit* vendor partners have contributed \$810,000 to date and many have witnessed their generosity in action while visiting microcredit clients in Costa Rica, the U.S, and Peru. These valued partners tell us that the collaborative *Supplier Alliance for Microcredit* enables them to support communities with more impact than they each could on their own."

Once the countries and local communities are selected, the Foundation does a site evaluation to ensure that the area is capable of supporting a microcredit product and that there are enough people in need. Finally, the Foundation finds an acceptable *Microfinance Institute (MFI)* partner that can support the community. This is not without challenges. "The *Programming Department of Whole Planet* takes great pains to do the research and visit local sites to find qualified MFIs," explains Sansone. "We limit our search to proven methods of microfinance...few are competent and qualify to work with *Whole Planet Foundation*. This search requires hard and hazardous travel where the team is exposed to dangerous roads, unstable local politics, felonious activities, as well infectious diseases and parasites. In my own development career, I've contracted malaria twice, dengue fever and other various unidentified illnesses, and a multitude of amoebas, protozoan, bacteria and other unwelcome critters."

Joy Peterson shared on a recent trip to Kenya; "This Microcredit client came to the meeting in a bright red dress and a huge smile. When I smiled back she said, "You should have seen me last year, I didn't look like this!" She told us she was happier and healthier and that *Jamii Bora Trust*, a *Whole Planet Foundation* partner in Kenya, made her the person she is now." Peterson adds, "It is sheer delight to meet women all over the globe who share their successes, challenges and hopes, showing how smart, hard-working and industrious they are."



While the *Whole Planet Foundation* does not get involved in the actual individual loan qualification process, it does stipulate that funds need to go to the poorest of the poor, so 98 percent of their clients are women. Usually the most marginalized group, women also have the greatest impact in their communities when given access to credit to invest in a small, home-based business. They use microcredit loans to start enterprises such as tailoring, tortilla making, small-scale farming, animal husbandry, small retail stores, food service, saloons and cosmetics. Peterson adds, "A loan as small as \$185 or less can make a huge difference in their lives, their choices, and their opportunity to lift themselves out of poverty." To see real testimonials, visit the *Whole Planet Foundation* website at www.wholeplanetfoundation.org.

As busy as there schedule is today, it appears the dedicated folks at the Foundation are just ramping up to that "million lives impacted" mark. There are 17 new projects slated for 2010 and whopping 22 for 2011! Truly, the *Whole Foods* motto "*Whole Foods, Whole Product, Whole Planet*" isn't just another catchy marketing slogan.



How you can get involved

1. Donate online yearround at www.wholeplanetfoundation.org and in stores during our annual six-week Prosperity Campaign each spring.
2. Start your own campaign on the *Whole Planet Foundation* website and invite friends & family to help you raise \$185 to support an entrepreneur and change a life. Many employers sponsor corporate matching gift programs, so check with your HR department.
3. Purchase *Whole Trade Guarantee* products at your local *Whole Foods Market*. A percentage of the retail sale will go directly to the Foundation to fund microlending projects in countries where the company sources products.
4. Check your local store's event calendar. Many hold events throughout the year to benefit the Foundation.