Global Communities, along with the John Deere Foundation and the John Deere Brazil Foundation, has identified opportunities for expanding community development activities that catalyze meaningful change for communities in need located near John Deere’s Brazil operations. The mission of this three-year program is to build the capacity of communities and local institutions to prioritize needs and mobilize resources that improve socio-economic conditions, particularly for at-risk youth.

In October 2013, Global Communities’ assessment team visited some of the poorest communities near John Deere’s operations in Brazil. When examining the scope of needs in John Deere’s home communities, we sought to identify issues that were both local and national so solutions could be adapted and replicated. Through our assessment meetings with local stakeholders and communities, we identified a core set of community concerns that are also prominent at the national level. They are:

- Lack of family cohesion and a community support network, which hinders socio-economic progress and perpetuates a culture of dependency and a handout mindset.
- Limited presence and organizational capacity of community-based organizations to engage residents in planning and development.
- Lack of leadership and enrichment activities leave youth vulnerable to risk-taking behaviors that can have far-reaching impacts on their futures.
- Lack of job skills and life skills lead to persistent unemployment and poverty.
The primary objectives of the program will address these problems through a complementary mutually reinforcing set of objectives. They are:

1. Build the capacity of community leaders and local institutions to carry out community development planning to leverage community assets and mobilize external resources, strengthening community resilience and social cohesion.

2. Create youth leaders and increase youth civic participation in public affairs through leadership training, improved executive functions and performance character, access to community mentors, and youth centric civic engagement activities.

3. Provide at-risk youth gainful employment opportunities through vocational training and apprenticeships with private sector partners in sectors proven to demonstrate increased employment demand.

SOWING FUTURES’ implementation approach draws upon Global Communities’ Participatory Action for Community Enhancement (PACE) methodology, which is our method of facilitating community development that unites and empowers community leaders to take ownership of local development priorities by building their capacity and implementing community projects. The program will also leverage Global Communities’ Workforce Development approach to identify gaps in employment demand and labor supply to engage the private sector, government and private-funded vocational training institutes to develop training programs that meet private sector rigors for employment entry. The methodology provides life skills and workforce readiness training to at-risk youth and employs a combination of classroom and on-the-job training that includes apprentices with private sector partners.
Sowing Futures will work with at-risk youth ranging from 10-19 years of age. Recognizing that most at-risk youth come from broken homes and communities and have suffered severe mental trauma and stress, the program aims to develop a support network through grass-roots community engagement and work with local schools and volunteer mentors. While many programs focus on building moral character, Sowing Futures’ youth leadership development framework is based on building performance character essential for perseverance. Leadership training will focus on building executive-level functions such as planning, decision-making, reasoning and problem solving. Youth will apply acquired skills through a series of coordinated civic engagement and community development projects funded by Sowing Futures and local partners and with support of volunteer mentors.

Sowing Futures will align its program activities with local John Deere Brazil Foundation corporate citizenship projects and volunteer activities, thereby complementing and strengthening them. The program will serve as a model for developing a long-term community investment framework for John Deere in Brazil. The sustainability of Sowing Futures is built into many aspects of the program to achieve the vision of creating long-term improvements in the lives and livelihoods of communities by addressing systemic root causes; building the capacity of community-based organizations and local NGO partners to sustain the solutions; strengthening relationships and coordination between stakeholders; using market-based solutions that bridge the gap between employers and job seekers, giving vulnerable youth specialized skills that are explicitly desired by the local private sector; and breaking the cycle of dependency and encouraging self-reliance within each community.

Global Communities, formerly CHF International, is an international development and humanitarian organization. Our mission is to create long-lasting, positive and community-led change that improves the lives and livelihoods of vulnerable people across the globe. Founded in 1952 as the Cooperative Housing Foundation, Global Communities serves more than 20 million people each year, empowering them to improve their lives and livelihoods for a better future. We are a politically-neutral, non-profit 501(c)(3) organization registered in the US. Global Communities is implementing a portfolio of 51 projects worth over $450 million in 19 countries around the world. We partner with communities to enable them to direct their own development for a sustainable future. We believe that the people best suited to determine community needs are community members themselves.