Remember the specific moment when you first realized you had a passion for agriculture? Maybe it was instantaneous; maybe it grew on you over a period of time. Whatever the case, you probably started your agricultural and/or scientific career training with the notion of making a difference in society by sustaining and improving agricultural production. Do you still have that same passion about your career today? If not, you might want to ask yourself what you need to do to “bring the passion back.”

Despite the initial passion a lot of us have at the beginning of our agricultural careers, sometimes everyday life can take a toll on our motivation. Mental burnout is commonly witnessed in soon-to-be or recent university graduates after enduring numerous years of schooling. Financial burdens associated with student debt and years of working entry-level jobs and/or living off a graduate student stipend is another strain that influences motivation. Of course, there is also a long list of other academic-specific topics that are seemingly taboo to talk about, even though they are essentially experienced by everyone. Some of these topics include the competitive academic job market, the pressure to publish, and for Ph.D. students, the feeling that securing a tenure track position immediately following graduation is the only way to justify your academic efforts. Dealing with just one of these topics is enough to dampen even the most productive early career member’s spirit, not to mention a combination of two or more.

Regardless of the dominating circumstance that may cause you to lose some of your enthusiasm, you should be assured that it is possible to get your passion back. This is not to say that you will be the equivalent of a young, doe-eyed undergraduate again. Instead, you will be able to develop a more mature, deeper passion than you had before. In order to be really good at what we “do” and to be personally happy, we need to rekindle our initial flame. We just might need a little more fuel to spark the fire this time. The goal is to keep our fire ignited because rediscovering your inner zeal. The key is to choose the path that works for you. If you treat this endeavor as a personal adventure, you might discover that the journey is the reward. It is not where you end up that leads to personal satisfaction, but the journey along the way that changes you. My personal journey to rediscover my passion for agricultural production was through volunteering in agricultural communities within the developing world. In particular, my path steered me to East Africa.

When I initially signed on to go to East Africa, I knew that it was make-or-break time. I was being offered the opportunity that I had always dreamed of, the chance to make a real difference by improving people’s lives in the agricultural science. After all of those years of writing papers, taking tests, and conducting field work, I was finally getting a chance to integrate my academic and practical knowledge. Moving to a rice production community in Kenya, a place I had never been before to work on a system I was not used to working with, where modern conveniences were not accessible, and I did not speak the local language. In other words, saying I was in out of my comfort zone would be an understatement. Although I put up and down that I was not even a wee bit afraid, in all honesty, I was terrified. Of course, I did not let that show to the outside, but on the inside, I was nervous. My biggest fear was of the inability to make a difference. I did make a difference. I was able to share ideas with the organization and farmers, and I was able to challenge myself by finding issues that were not as familiar to me. I learned a lot of new things, met a lot of new people, and made a lot of new friends. By the end of the trip, I had my passion back.

Understandingly, starting out on a self-discovering journey might be a little uncomfortable. But