

## SYNLawn Michigan and Author Mitch Albom Install Soy-backed Grass for Haitian Children

Children at a Haitian orphanage are no longer limited to playing on a mud field or concrete. Instead, they are laughing as they race, flip and even take first steps across green soy-backed artificial grass installed for them through a partnership between the Michigan distributor for the SYNLawn company and prize-winning sportswriter and author Mitch Albom.



Heavy tropical rains erode any traditional grass options for the Albom-supported “Have Faith Haiti” home in the capital city of Port-au-Prince. Haiti’s frequent droughts and a lack of irrigation makes it nearly impossible to get grass to grow or survive. When asked what they wanted at their new children’s home, they kids would say grass.

“We are excited to see how U.S. soybean oil is used in innovative solutions such as SYNLawn’s grass,” said (Insert name of Michigan soybean grower). “It is great to see SYNLawn Michigan bring the benefits of soy to our state through their high-performing grass and then also take it to Haiti with them too.”

Since 2008, SYNLawn has used U.S. soybean oil in the backing for their artificial grasses installed in more than 300,000 residential and commercial installations across the nation. The company is growing quickly throughout the world since it offers a sustainable plant-based solution that doesn’t require water, weeding, fertilizers, pesticides and mowing. Based in Novi, SYNLawn Michigan is installing soy-backed grass everywhere from backyards, golf courses, playgrounds, dog parks and even beer gardens.

Their journey to install soy-backed grass in Haiti started when SYNLawn Michigan’s Operations Manager Julia Firavich answered their office phone in June 2022. Firavich was already fan of Albom’s books that have collectively sold more than 40 million copies worldwide. She was surprised to be speaking directly with Albom! Firavich and other SYNLawn employees became even greater fans when they learned of his vision to use their product to benefit the children.

After the devastating 2010 earthquake in Haiti, Albom had joined a Michigan minister to check on a children’s home. Albom soon became a central figure in the home that took its inspired name partly from Albom’s book “Have a Little Faith.” He wanted to

answer the kids' dream of having grass for a play area while dealing with the realities that natural grass won't survive. Albom and SYNLawn Michigan soon began planning the solution: 17,000-plus square feet of soy-backed grass that is certified under USDA's BioPreferred program.

An eight-member SYNLawn team, comprised of SYNLawn Michigan and SYNLawn New England staff, donated their time to fly to Haiti where they were able to complete the installation in five days. They used the last of their plane's weight limit to carry on a box of soy protein-packed nutrition too.

The American Soybean Association's ASA's World Initiative for Soy in Human Health Program is partnering with Edesia Nutrition – a Rhode Island enterprise that uses U.S. soy in the production of Ready to Use Supplementary Foods (RUSF) that are shipped widely around the world. The United Soybean Board is supporting WISHH's work with Edesia on a formulation of the product that contains the most soy that the company has used to date in RUSF products.

There are eight other manufacturers in the world, including one in Haiti, making similar RUSF products. Demand is high. Have Faith Haiti staff knew how to put it to good use to strengthen a boy who took his wobbly first steps on the new soy-backed grass installation.

Firavich says, "The kids were absolutely amazing... When we got out of the cars upon arrival, we were delighted to receive hundreds of hugs from everybody!"

Now that she is back, Firavich says, "It's hard to put into words...it still feels like a fever dream... Everyone [at Have Faith Haiti] was so welcoming, and so nice. Our team felt so appreciated for the work we did."

SYNLawn Michigan also created a summer 2023 internship for a Have Faith Haiti graduate, now a college student in Michigan. Who knows? Maybe this student will be the next generation to install soy-backed grass in Haiti or Michigan.