

Project Harvest – Guatemala

A project of the Niagara Warehouse of Hope

Report on Year Two of Five Year Plan
November 2006 to December 2007

Introduction

Project Harvest is a small food security program in Guatemala. The project's focus is on year-round organic vegetable gardens and is holistic in its approach to improving the health and well being of poor rural families.

Summary of Activities

In 2007 the project was active in twelve communities in two areas of Guatemala. There are 175 participants; 95% are women and form 12 groups. They have created 116 individual family gardens and six communal gardens. Counting family members there are over a thousand beneficiaries. New people are asking to join.

The project places emphasis on empowering the participants to build capabilities to become self-sufficient. The project has a Guatemalan team consisting of a co-ordinator, two regional and eight community promoters (field workers).

The following pages highlight some of the work and achievements in Year 2 of our Five Year Plan.



Project's Goal - Empowerment Today for Self-sufficiency Tomorrow

Incorporating Organic Manure



Roberta Garcia, for the first time ever, harvests a bunch of Swiss chard grown in soil improved with compost.

Over 1000 bags of chicken and cow manure were converted with other ingredients into compost. The end results (humus and soil) of eighty five compost piles from all the communities were incorporated into the soils to improve their fertility. In many cases soils that were dead have come to life.

Soil

Conservation



Zola Barrientos talks about how soil improvements have made a huge difference in the production of vegetables in the communal garden at La Esperanza.

Three workshops were held with 44 women from three communities on the theme of conservation of soils. Techniques ranging from prevention of soil erosion to the improvement of soils were studied. Twenty bags of plants (seedlings of "pasto") were planted to create live barriers that hold the soil in place.

Seedling Nurseries



Maria Victoria Castro Jax inspects the quality of seedlings on an educational exchange visit in Casa Blanca.

Nine new above ground nurseries were constructed to provide seedlings for project participants in the communities. Seedlings improve the quality of garden plants and allow for up to four harvests in the same garden per year. The raised nurseries prevent small animals from eating the new shoots.

Team Accompaniment



Accompanying new participants like Rosario Puac is a key strategy in assuring that they learn new practices to improve their gardens.

Central to the success of maintaining productive gardens is the amount of teaching of new methods and follow-up education being offered to project participants. The Project Harvest team of coordinator and regional and community field workers made hundreds of teaching visits to help with orientation of project participants. The goal is to provide the knowledge and the materials for participants to be self-sufficient.

Participation and Empowerment, Nutrition Education,

Small Animals



Juana Yax points to her rabbits that will be a new source of meat and organic fertilizer.

Eight families in Choquisis have received the first rabbits in our program to introduce small animals in the project. This small animal project is designed to help address the shortage of protein in family diets and to have a sustainable source of manure from the animals to compost and improve the quality of the garden soil. Each family received two females and a male.

Capturing Rain



Victoriana Rutuch and her son Jorge show neighbours a new rain water reservoir with a capacity of 10,000 liters.

Four systems to capture rainwater were constructed in Pitahaya I & II, Xecaja and Xocoxol. Water for irrigating vegetable gardens in the dry season is important. There is never enough of it. Capturing water in the rainy season and storing it for later use is critical in responding to the vagaries of climate change that put into peril any guarantees of the availability of the precious resource.

Fruit & Forest Trees



Project Participants learn techniques of planting and caring for tree seedlings during demonstration by arborist.

Participants in the five Communities in the Totonicapán area received over five hundred tree seedlings. The trees consisted of grafted peach seedlings and *aliso* trees, a valuable deciduous tree known for its useable parts. The trees will provide income, nutrition and organic material that will benefit the families and their gardens in future years.

Organic Fertilizers & Pesticides



Promoter, Olga Tumax, demonstrates how to mix a batch of foliar fertilizer.

Nine workshops on the preparation of organic leaf (foliar) fertilizers and organic pesticides were held in the areas of Totonicapán and Chiquimula. Participants learnt how to make use of natural ingredients available in their communities to make a mixture to combat white fly, black spot, aphids and caterpillars.

Organic & Ecological Practices, Diversifying Livelihoods

Emiteria Garcia hoses down a seed bed with some of the last drops of water from a creek at the beginning of the dry season. Soon she will have to rely only on stored water.

Hard Work & Dedication



Emiteria and the members of her group have worked hard to chisel this garden out of the side of a mountain in El Mineral, Chiquimula. Over the last year the group has added substantial improvements to their communal garden. They dug a trench around the perimeter to prevent flash rains from washing away the laboriously constructed terraces. They hauled hundreds of pounds of manure up a steep hill to improve their soil quality and built a fence to keep out animals. And they planted ... etc.

Conclusions Project evaluations over this past year have been positive. Eight "kitchen" workshops were held on the role of plants in good health and nutrition. Members of some groups are selling their surplus vegetables in the market. Thousands of vegetables were produced and consumed.

This year a "solidarity fund" has been started in some groups. Members make a monetary contribution for materials they have received. The fund is then used to cover costs of some items like seeds as well as to help each other out when someone in the group has an emergency.

Much of the ongoing work in the gardens is not mentioned in this report; such as the installing and reinstalling of the irrigation systems in the dry season, the collection and saving of seeds, and educational tours of each other's gardens to exchange experiences and in this way learn from each other.



Young mother Maria Alvarez and her two children

We thank all our present donors and invite new donors to be a part of this vital work. Help us sustain and expand this project.

Please make your contribution payable to: **Niagara Warehouse of Hope - Project Harvest**

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