

Project Harvest Guatemala

A project of the Niagara Warehouse of Hope

Detail of hand woven cloth by
Project member Victoria Tucubal

Letter from Project Harvest Coordinator - Paul Lemieux

January 2011

Dear Friends

In early January I arrived in Guatemala with three objectives. One was to partake in a team evaluation of what Project Harvest had achieved in 2010. The second was to reflect what we have learned over the last five years. And the third was to begin to set our course for the future. What follows is a brief reflection of what I experienced and how my objectives were realized.

Overcoming obstacles!

I visited each of the communities where Project Harvest has members. Three months into the dry season I was expecting to see only remnants of the lush gardens I had visited five months earlier during the rainy season. Now, the countryside was parched and dry for lack of rain; the time of death was upon the land. Over the last decade climate change has put in jeopardy the little water that exists for irrigation during the dry season in many parts of Guatemala. As I entered garden after garden I was shocked, pleasantly shocked, to see so many vegetable gardens in full production.

How was this possible? I knew the project had progressed in many areas of its work, but flourishing gardens in the middle of a dry season had eluded us up to now. It was the realization of what we had envisioned years ago. We have made great strides in completing the project's mission. (Please see page 4 for an outline of the work completed in 2010).

Creating a model that works!

Project Harvest has been described as a school, and rightfully so. It is a school where family members, both young and old, learn new ways of improving food security in a sustainable way. This January, project members received Project Harvest diplomas as a symbol of all they have learned. They have learned how to capture and store rain water for irrigation, improve soils, make organic fertilizer, save seeds, grow seedlings and complement garden vegetables with other nutritious foods. This is a legacy of our Five Year Plan. A model has been created, very much in an organic way by building on new ideas and learning by trial and error. Project participants have been empowered to improve their lives.

(Continued on page 4.)



Members in Pitahaya II, Chiquimula, received diplomas that read (in part): "When women, men, girls and boys have something to eat, there is hope of life." The project is very much like a school where families are learning to produce food organically in a sustainable way.

Testimonials by Project Harvest's Team of Community Promoters



Teresa
Rosario
Vasquez
lives and
works in the
community
of Vasquez.

Rosario is a single woman living with her parents, grandparents & brother.

"We used to have a great deal of malnutrition – no water, no gardens. When I joined Project Harvest, it was as if I began a new life. Now my family and I eat our very own vegetables from our very own garden, produced by our very own hands. And we don't have to go to market, except to sell surplus vegetables," says Rosario.

"More women are joining our group. They come and visit my garden, and they become enthused. I help them with their gardens."

"Before Project Harvest, we planted only corn, and we used only chemicals (fertilizers). We had to buy vegetables in the market, which were not always of good quality. They were expensive, dried out, and often made us sick. Now we have our very own fresh, wholesome, and organic produce, and we no longer get sick. Also we didn't know that the green leaves of vegetables such as beets and turnips are nutritious and good to eat; we used to cut off those parts and discard them. In the

Project Harvest workshops, we learn how to cook and eat these."

"One of the important reasons the vegetables are so full of vitamins is that we use only organic fertilizer, obtained from my many rabbits and worm composting."



Marcos Osorio Lux
is from the Casa
Blanca /Xecaja.

Marcos is a father of eight children. In his words:

"Before Project Harvest, I used to travel to the coast to work for big landowners to earn a little money to feed my family, away from them for long periods. And now because of Project Harvest, and the training I have received, my family and I are closer; I have a better, less stressful life. It is through my family that I can be in solidarity with others; and it is through Project Harvest that I learn new ideas and have new experiences."

"Before Project Harvest came along the women stayed in the house, looking after the children. They did not know how to

turn the soil and prepare the ground, thinking this was men's work. Now the women can do most anything the men can do. More importantly, they do not have to worry about where the money will come from to go to the market to buy food. Now they get food from their very own earth."

"We used to have such misery – lack of water, lack of food, malnutrition, especially among the children. Now we have productive gardens. More children are in school; they have better nutrition; and they are able to help in the gardens.

Paula is a single woman. In her own words:

"When I was little I learned to participate in workshops with my Mom who was a member of a women's group. I learned to weave and to sell my handwork in the market to make a little money to buy food."

"Then Project Harvest came into my life and gave me the courage, the confidence, and the opportunity to lead a group of women in a new concept in gardening which is organic. I became secretary of the committee we formed." "We have families with great needs – abandoned women with children who are part of the project. Through Project Harvest I am

Paula Bruna Velasquez
community promotor
in Cuesta del Aire.

continually widening my horizons, preparing myself to do whatever is needed to develop as a person to help others, whether that be in helping with gardening techniques or in raising the morale of the group. The women trust me; they share their gardening and personal problems."

"We grow vegetables we never ate before; the men enjoy the vegetables like they never did before; and they join us by constructing the rainwater catchment cisterns, the pens for the rabbits, and in other heavy labour. The children join in the work after school.

"Project Harvest has given us community. We come out of our homes; we work together; we talk together, and sometimes we laugh together so hard that tears come to our eyes."

Josefina is a mother of five children and community leader.

"Since I have attended the many Project Harvest workshops I have learned much about the theory and practice of organic gardening. I have learned how to terrace and prepare beds or 'tablones', and grow seedlings. We sell the surplus vegetables which amounts to about 10% of what we grow."

"The women in my community have built a good relationship which is a result of working together close to home, without having to travel outside our community to attend workshops. We want to continue working together. My family is healthier, and has fewer illnesses."

Josefina
Jorge,
Xecoxol

Santos, a single woman, is a born teacher and organizer with a flair for bringing people together.

"I could not become a "professional", she says, "because my economic situation did not permit this. Like all campesina women, I dedicated myself to housework." Santos had already identified three existing problems in her community: illiteracy, hunger and malnutrition. And so when Project Harvest came into her life with a holistic, integrated, organic approach to gardening, she was propelled into a level of activity which has not diminished in three years.

In her words: "There has been a profound change in my community about the total approach to gardening organically without the use of pesticides; and there has been a recognition of the need for a variety of vegetables in the daily diet to combat malnutrition. We say, "From the garden to the cook pot; no need to go to market". Of course, we sell our surplus and buy such items as sugar, salt, oil and soap."

Santos Maria
Mendez, El Guayabo.

"We have learned many techniques in organic gardening but we have also learned about community. One huge benefit of working as a community is the growth we have experienced. We began with one community garden and eight women; we now have 21 women working together. We also have 8 individual gardens.

"I am so happy to be a promoter", she says, "because through Project Harvest I help so many

people; I am doing community service. Working together, we get wonderful results."

Project Harvest: Report of Work Completed in 2010

The 2010 Work Plan COMPONENTS – for 10 community groups with a total of 208 families

1. Establishment and maintenance of Family and Communal Gardens		2. Soil Conservation / Fertilizers: • Manure: cow, chicken, rabbit • Worm composters • Worm compost		3. Seeds / Nurseries	4. Barriers: • Retaining grasses • Fences • Shading material • Mulch	5. Trees • fruit • forest	6. Small Animals: • Rabbit cages • Rabbits • Chicken coops • Laying hens		7. Rain Water catchment systems	8. Irrigation	9. Educational workshops
# of family size gardens	# of community size gardens	# of bags of manure (chicken or cow) integrated into soil	# of worm composting systems initiated	# of above ground nurseries constructed	# of protective fences constructed	Pruning and educational maintenance workshops this year	# of rabbit cages constructed	# of chicken coops constructed	# of rain water catchment systems built	# of systems installed	# of educational workshops on different themes
166	5	1215	40	6	36	ongoing	10	5	13	6	47

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A vision for the future!

Project Harvest's vision is to multiply its model so that families in many more communities can improve their nutrition

and their lives by improving their food security. The hope is to move into new communities and not only to replicate our model but also to pass on the skills we have acquired. Currently other community based and non-governmental organizations are very interested in our work. We aim to be in a position to build on our model by collaborating with these other organizations.

We also envision a focus on youth by expanding our work



Community garden, El Guayabo

with school aged students. A project goal would be to help them to develop their abilities so that they too can acquire skills that can last them a life time.

There is still much to do. Food insecurity impacts many communities.

And the rise in food prices is causing even more havoc.

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.

Many thanks,

Paul Lemieux

Tax receipts are available

Project Harvest - Guatemala	
REVENUE, EXPENSES & ASSETS for 2010	
REVENUE	Totals
Donations from Individuals	18,525.62
Grants from Institutions	29,850.97
Total Revenues	48,376.59
EXPENSES	

Program expenses in Guatemala	59,103.80
Administration in Guatemala	1,330.67
Administration in Canada	682.47
Total Expenses	61,116.94
Excess of revenues over expenses	(12,740.35)
Assets at beginning of the year	42,004.12
NET ASSETS – END of YEAR	29,263.77

Please make contributions payable to: **Niagara Warehouse of Hope - Project Harvest**, 46 Broadway Ave., St. Catharines, Ontario, L2M 1M4
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