

PROJECT HARVEST



Guatemala

RESILIENCE

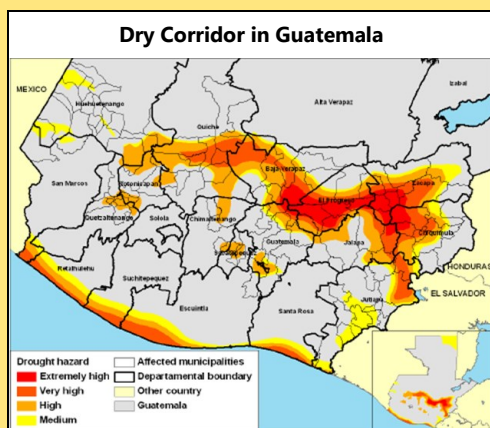
A newsletter of PROJECT HARVEST
- GUATEMALA

2013 — Niagara Warehouse of Hope



Food Crisis in Guatemala's Dry Corridor

This September PROJECT HARVEST warned that a growing food crisis in Pitahaya, Chiquimula, one of the communities where Project Har-



vest has been successful, will continue to accelerate if more is not done to respond to this humanitarian crisis. An appeal was launched by PROJECT HARVEST to support relief efforts

in the region.

Food insecurity is impacting many parts of Guatemala this year. For rural families in this area, 80% of whom live in extreme poverty, their suffering is exacerbated by three overlapping adversities.

It all began when last year's harvest was damaged and reduced by drought in December 2012. Food reserves from this harvest were largely depleted by May 2013.

The second disaster making the situation worse is a major rust blight in the coffee growing regions resulting in substantial losses. This blight is expected to last for the next two to three years. Its impact on communities like Pitahaya

has been devastating. Income from the seasonal work that the coffee harvest provides has been crucial. A drastically reduced coffee harvest



means families cannot earn the money they need to bridge the gap when food reserves run out.

The third setback exacerbating the situation (cont'd on page 4 - see Food Crisis)

Actions to Address the Food Emergency

PROJECT HARVEST was faced with a dilemma. We do not see ourselves as an organization designed to respond to food emergencies such as that unfolding in Chiquimula. Our mission is rather to provide the training and some resources for families to grow some of their own food in a long term sustainable way. This sustainable method involves a rainwater catchment system designed to support the cultivation of some food during a drought and dry season. This year the catchment systems never had a chance to fill up. The families with

whom we work in the community of Pitahaya are enduring an ongoing food emergency.

Families are cutting back in their food consumption by eating only twice a day. What little corn and beans are surviving the drought are being eaten green with little being stored for reserves. Children are falling into a state of acute malnutrition. The situation is bleak and only going to get worse. What does PROJECT HARVEST do in this situation? (cont'd on page 2 - see Actions)

We were faced with three options. Do nothing; launch a special appeal to raise funds to buy food for the families in need; or help support Pitahaya's community leaders resolve their own emergency situation. The choice of options was made easier because this year PROJECT HARVEST has been helping the families with whom we work to become better organized and teaching them the skills they need to look after their own affairs.

And so after much discussion PROJECT HARVEST decided to help the community leaders to obtain emergency food supplies that have been stockpiled by government or non-government agencies in Guatemala. We supported them in the preparation of the documentation they would need to present their needs directly to potential donors. That is with a list of the families in need, photographs and testimonies of the situation and letters of introduction.

It was a first time experience for the four community leaders who traveled to the capital and spoke for themselves directly to representatives of large agencies. It was exhausting physically and mentally for them. They divided their presentations into four themes; the scarcity of

water, the loss of their crops, the lack of work because of the coffee blight and the deteriorating state of their health.

Their leadership resulted in some immediate food for the



Women of Pitahaya obtained food to address scarcity due to drought.

community. As of mid-October over 5,000 pounds of rice, beans, sugar, incaparina (a fortified flour) and cooking oil has been obtained and distributed with potentially more to come. Important also is that they obtained the satisfaction and self-confidence that comes from organizing themselves, speaking for themselves and obtaining results from which the whole community will benefit.

Why is there so much Hunger in Guatemala?

This year the levels of acute child malnutrition are higher than ever. The "seasonal hunger" that impacts rural families during the time of year when food from the previous year's harvest runs out has been especially difficult because of the continuing unpredictability of rainfall (as reported on page 1). Almost daily newspaper headlines



Front page article of the Guatemalan daily *Prensa Libre* of July 3, 2013

scream out at the seriousness of the ever increasing number of children suffering the full effects of insufficient nutritious food.

Part of the context of this situation is that Guatemala has the fourth highest rate of malnutrition of children under five in the world. Close to 50% of its children are chronically malnourished, a situation that local and international organizations frequently denounce. The UNICEF representative for Guatemala early this year publicly admonished the Government of Guatemala for allowing its children to suffer this plight for so many years given the comparative wealth that exists within the country. A recent editorial in the largest newspaper condemns the government for not making "sufficient efforts to reduce and eradicate the high levels of malnutrition in some regions of the country, a scourge that should bring shame to those who have the possibility of taking action and the authority to undertake visionary programs that could change the fate of thousands of Guatemalans who are doomed to die in the next few years or if they survive, face a life full of limitations." (*Prensa Libre*, July 5, 2013)

(cont'd on page 4 - see *Why Hunger*)

Formation for long term development -new and inspiring

This year Project Harvest has broadened its commitment to sustainability and long-term development by employing a



Community members in Xecaja work on a Rural Participatory Diagnostic.

"formation promoter". Veronica Vercian has joined the Guate-

malan team in order to help put more focus on the strengthening of skills and improved organization, as well as to better prepare the members to become active participants in their community; that is, to take ownership, and become independent.

Participants in five communities began this formation following a program divided into a number of themes. Ultimately the goal is to improve the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve this. In Veronica's own words: "I use a number of popular education exercises to allow groups to examine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that exist for them as they strive to improve food security for their families. (the SWOT method)"

These themes are discussed in work sessions that are participatory, use a popular education methodology, where the participant learns by doing, and their knowledge, ideas and proposals are valued. As a result, participants are empowered with new skills and awareness by way of these formation sessions. (See more details in future Newsletters)

Impacts of success in Totonicapán

Ironically in Totonicapán on the other side of the country the rains have been plentiful. (See photos of the September harvest.)



Elena Chic and Antonio Oztzy no longer buy food in the market but harvest their own 2 or 3 times a week.



Paula, local "community enlace", Ana Baten, Verónica, formation promoter, and Olga, agricultural promoter.



Maria Chaj Gox still has 30 squash, 30 cauliflowers and 60 cabbages in her garden after consuming equal amounts.

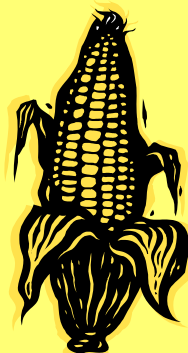


Juana Pu Mus's soils were very sandy but the incorporation of organic matter has significantly changed her production.

Food Crisis — *Cont'd from page 1*

is a repeat drought this year in the dry corridor. This geographical area of Guatemala has acquired its name because of the changes to its climate that have provoked prolonged droughts during the traditional rainy season. This year the rains did start in May as they usual do but then for the most part they stopped. Oxfam reports that the area of Pitahaya has endured 30 days without rain up to August 12th. Crops are at risk after ten days. After fifteen days major losses occur. The report states that Pitahaya is in one of the worst drought areas and can expect an 80% loss of corn and a 78% loss of beans.

Project Harvest consulted with its members in Pitahaya as to how to best address the situation and together we decided on a course of action (see Actions page 1).



Why Hunger — *Cont'd from page 2*

The Guatemalan government has set up various secretariats, ministries, programs, etc., to address the atrocious situation, chief among them being their Zero Hunger Plan. It focusses on ten actions: Seven are meant to address nutrient or micro-nutrient deficiencies. The other three address hygiene, vaccinations and breast feeding. One of its main objectives is to reduce chronic child malnutrition by 10% by 2015. All of these actions and objectives are important but there are unspoken causes which most do not address. Unfortunately many reports this year indicate that malnutrition is becoming worse not better. It has been pointed out by some that the root causes of chronic malnutrition are not a mystery. But dealing with these causes would mean having to address inequality and unjust structures. Few in Guatemala are willing to do this.

Future Plans — “what we hope to do with your support”

In March members of our Canadian and Guatemalan teams visited and met with members of three new communities. We are at the point where we are ready to expand our work. PROJECT HARVEST has a proven program that has shown results. The new communities are in the area of Jocotan, Chiquimula. The terrain would be some of the

hardest we have ever worked. The challenges are immense but the needs are the same. After meeting and discussing the possibilities with members of the community we were all in favor of moving ahead with plans to have green gardens spring up in this dry harsh environment. We need your support to help us have this happen.



Terrain is rocky, dry and inhospitable and is part of the dry corridor.



Community members expressed a need & desire to establish gardens.

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

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