

Dear Friend,

December 20, 2005

It's time to update you on Tierra Nueva. But let me begin by thanking you for the support you have given to the work in Honduras. It amazes me how you have been faithful to this project. Even though we are a small effort in a big world of problems, Tierra Nueva has been able to provide consistent support to farming families, most of whom earn their livelihoods on just two to three acres or less of land.

I visited Tierra Nueva for three weeks last June. It was the first time in years to be there during the rainy season. I figured out why. Rains did their job of limiting the time I could be in the villages and with the farmers and their families. A friend from our church, Jeff Yordy, also traveled with me. If you go to the North Suburban Mennonite Church website and look under "Activities" (northsuburban.org/activities/tierra_nueva) you can find Tierra Nueva and some of the pictures from our trip.

The promoters have been doing an excellent job although I'm not the one to give an objective report. Nevertheless, when you drive across the country to get to the areas where they have been working with the farmers, there is a visible delineation marked by the soil conserving contour farming technologies they have been teaching. And this is only one aspect of the work which we have always called holistic development.

I was wondering how much this has actually cost, so when I arrived home, I got out our old records and came up with a ballpark amount. The total cost for the San Luis project from the first day until present has been around \$150,000. Since that includes the four years Joni and I lived there, paying Aguinaldo to work with us full time during those years, buying a small house where the promoters can meet and have occasional courses, and twenty-one years of the promoters investing in developing their farms as places of experimentation, education and demonstration as well as visiting other communities to work along side almost a thousand other farmers and their families and giving community courses, I think Tierra Nueva has been amazingly cost effective.

New Challenges

Like farmers throughout the world, the farmers in the Tierra Nueva area are always facing new challenges. The instability of coffee commodity prices has created anxiety and many of the young people in these areas have migrated, mostly illegally, to the US. We continue to work on the problem of coffee prices with the farmers, but unless they find inroads into the specialty markets, they will not find a solution to this problem. As you read this, volunteers for Coffee Corps, Bud Hensley and his wife, Jane-Ann, are in Honduras working with some of the Tierra Nueva coffee producers to help them move in this direction. They will be there for several weeks.

Those who do not grow coffee are also effected. The coffee harvest work provides needed income for many of them. A farmer who grows corn, beans and vegetables may depend on the coffee farmers for markets. These basic grain farmers who live in the lower altitudes where quality coffee cannot grow may also be facing some other serious threats. CAFTA, the Central American Free Trade Act was passed this last year. With it comes the likelihood that tariffs for agricultural imports into Central America will be lowered or eliminated. Inexpensive, subsidized US grown corn and perhaps beans will flood the markets. It will be impossible for Honduran farmers to be able to compete with corn that may be sold at below

production costs as has been the case in Mexico, forcing many to leave their land and in many cases migrate north to the US for jobs.

Perhaps Tierra Nueva can help some of the farmers adapt to the expected changes. That is why our goal this year in San Luis was for each of the 150 farmers we were visiting to graft seventeen fruit trees, and in each of the 27 communities to start a nursery of forestry species. It is a modest beginning, but I think with time it could grow and in some villages really have an impact. Growing tropical woods could eventually provide a future, sustainable income as may some of the fruits which have Honduran and foreign markets. Corn and beans will probably just be grown on a much smaller scale for their own consumption. After all, the corn they produce is not oil dependent which will likely have increasing importance. Nor will it be genetically modified, which is perhaps a bigger issue for Central Americans than many of us, as it is a large percentage of their diet.

Visitors

Mark Baker was able to travel to Honduras again this year and spent a day in Bible study with the promoters. The promoters consider this a very important part of their own personal development that helps them to be better prepared to work with other farmers.

Calvin College in Michigan sent a group of students to live with the families of the promoters for a week as part of a semester abroad program where they study social justice issues and models of development. This is the third year for this project. It has been very meaningful for the promoters as they get to know new people and learn from them and share their own lives. The students work in the fields and kitchens with the families and then travel out to the villages with the promoters to see what they are doing there. At night, by the light of candles and kerosene lamps, they read their Bibles together and discuss the issues both the Hondurans families face in today's world as well as those we deal with as affluent North Americans. For all of us to find peace in this world, I think the more transparent we are with each other, the closer we come to knowing each other, the more hope there is for us all.

Next year, Tierra Nueva hopes to put more work into helping farmers diversify their farms to face the upcoming challenges of globalization, to work to keep families together and on their land in a time when more and more are tempted to migrate north, to offer opportunities for people of different backgrounds to come together and share their lives, and to spread the good news of God's promise that "the hungry will be filled with good things."

I hope that you can be there with us through your gift of prayer and/or financial support. And visit the website at www.northsuburban.org/activities/tierra_nueva.html.

Peace to you,

Larry Sell

Donations are needed for 2006. If you send any donations they should be sent to me with the checks made out to **Tierra Nueva**. On the bottom MEMO line put **HONDURAN PROJECT, SAN**

LUIS. Send the checks to **Larry Sell, 23471 Petite Lake Rd., Lake Villa, IL 60046.** The checks will then be forwarded to Tierra Nueva in Burlington, Washington where they will be deposited. They are tax-deductable.