

November 9, 2004

Dear Friend of Tierra Nueva,

Hoping to get out of a little work, I asked Aguinaldo to write something about Tierra Nueva and send it to me. Aguinaldo has been a part of Tierra Nueva's work as long as I have, about 20 years. Although he lives outside the program area in another part of Honduras, he makes monthly visits to the area providing support.

What he sent me, besides his usual lengthy and detailed financial report of every dollar spent, was a list of the things Tierra Nueva is teaching and promoting with the farmers. Usually I try to avoid such lists, as they seem tedious and boring. I was hoping for a good story. But I suppose much of Tierra Nueva's story is in the tedious and sometimes dull, especially if you don't give a coot's hoot about farming and gardening. Have you ever weeded a few acres in the hot sun with just a hoe? It's a life that tends to get downright dreary. The backbone of Tierra Nueva still remains to be appropriate and sustainable farming technologies and involves the day to day of farmers and their families. And to many of us in our fast paced technologically enhanced world of constant diversion and entertainment the details of what Tierra Nueva does could be simply humdrum. Yet what you get if you ask a Honduran farmer to write about Tierra Nueva is primarily a list of the things Tierra Nueva does.

I debated what to do with Aguinaldo's letter and have decided to give you an edited version of what he sent. I've annotated and severely abbreviated Aguinaldo's list of technologies that follows his introduction. They are appropriate technologies that address some of the felt needs of the Honduran community. They make up the ways that Tierra Nueva helps each farmer in their daily lives, hoping to bring sustainability to their way of life, to the land and the environment in which they live, to help them keep their place on this earth and help them keep it well. He writes:

“Tierra Nueva concerns itself with improving each day the quality of life of the men and women who farm. For this reason we are concerned with learning new and useful things that can help us out of poverty, giving us a better life.

”There are so many things to be done when working with humanity, but there are times when we are not able to realize some of the tasks we want because there is not enough time. There are people who could help us to do more but we do not have the resources to pay them. The Tierra Nueva promoters work 9 days a month and each visits 4 to 5 communities twice a month. There are 18 promoters, 15 men and 3 women. Our work is to encourage the following practices, working with the poorest farmers.

1. Erosion control/soil conservation. *He elaborates more than you'd care to hear.*
2. Soil improvement and enrichment through composting and cover crops.
3. Alternatives to pesticide use. *Again there is a list that follows this, describing Integrated Pest Management, for example. The more interesting is the homegrown repellants and teas made from “bitter, spicy/hot, strong smelling plants” used for fumigating. It does work. I've seen it.*

4. Weed management. *Now this must really sound trite. Of course you've got to manage the weeds. Yet Aguinaldo writes a paragraph on the subject of weeds. In essence he says don't burn 'em, avoid herbicides, use them as a part of the total soil management and enrichment program. Have you read ch. 12 Dandelion Wine?*
5. Caring for the forest, protecting the watersheds and reforestation.
6. Family and school organic vegetable gardens: "We do this so that each family with whom we work improves their diet," writes Aguinaldo. "We get the whole family involved in the chores of the garden. Consuming more vegetables of better quality improves their health," *As a note, Honduran diets do not normally include many vegetables, something we've worked to change.*
7. Small fish ponds: sometimes very small and sometimes combined with irrigation systems and/or erosion control ditches. Also part of improving nutrition.
8. Irrigation systems including low cost, homemade drip irrigation.
9. Sustainability through diversity – more diversified farms. *I wrote about this in my last letter. Remember?*
10. Courses with women on nutrition and learning new recipes
11. *What's left are several technologies, although important, they are not given much attention at this point, even though they may have at some point in the past, such as composting latrines and the construction of metal grain silos.*

Aguinaldo continues, "One of the things the families in the US who support Tierra Nueva have helped to fund is in the area of theology. We have courses every year that have helped us to understand the best way to work with the people with whom we work. Little by little we are practicing having Bible based reflections in houses with the farmers. We have no intension of offending anyone or of changing their religion. We are simply coming to understand that God loves us. Many of us have always believed that God is angry and carries a big stick constantly watching to punish us for every wrong we do. Our studies teach us of God's love and are always viewed in relation to what we each are living and who we are as campesinos: our harvests, our sicknesses, our worries, our joys, etc.

"We trust you will realize when you read this that we are getting good use from your donations, and that this will encourage you to keep supporting us so that we can continue to develop activities that help the poorest people in our area. May God bless you dear reader, and may Christ's peace be with each of you."

Coffee Project Update

Many of the farmers in Tierra Nueva's area are coffee farmers caught in the web of the plummeting prices of the commodity coffee market. They are unable to sell their product above their production costs. Their best hope for improving the value of their product would be to get their coffee into the Specialty Coffee market. Tierra Nueva hopes to someday establish a brand of coffee under the Tierra Nueva name that will signify quality Honduran coffee. The sale of this coffee could someday generate funds for community development projects in Honduran villages. The challenge begins with developing a consistent high quality product.

Tierra Nueva applied to the Coffee Corps (aligned with Coffee Quality Institute and Specialty Coffee Association of America) for an expense paid onsite assessment from an expert volunteer. In later February Bud Hensley of Global Insights traveled to Honduras and spent 2 weeks visiting and assessing coffee production in the region. In his report (available upon

request) Bud Hensley speaks very highly of Tierra Nueva and makes the following observations:

“Tierra Nueva has a sincere and longstanding commitment to conservation, sustainability and supporting the farming families of their regions. They have a well-developed program in place, which has for the past 20 years assisted campesinos in improving cultivation methods with an emphasis on sustainable organic farming practices and food security through crop diversification. They have a good reputation within the communities and the coffee industry for following good practices and providing education in not only farming, but health, nutrition, hygiene; in essence supporting the overall well-being of their farming families.

“Tierra Nueva has the organization, personnel and infrastructure to train coffee farmers in their regions in the cultivation of quality coffee. They have the knowledge and the materials and have developed an effective training protocol. Their meetings are well attended and the promoters that we observed are eager to improve their knowledge and skills and to continue their work in improving the lives of farmers.

“Based on our observations, Tierra Nueva is ready and eager to begin training the coffee farmers in their region. Producers currently are not producing coffee that meets specialty coffee standards – in all areas, cultivation, post harvest and commercialization. Tierra Nueva currently has coffee producers whose coffee could qualify as specialty coffee. The farms we visited would qualify for organic certification, as well. However, these farmers are not processing their coffee to specialty coffee standards.

“Tierra Nueva requires funding immediately for training if they are going to proceed with this specialty coffee program in the 2004-5 harvest.”

Unfortunately, we have had to suspend the coffee project until we find the economic support we need. It will probably require a grant specifically for the development of the coffee project. If you have any ideas, contact us. If you want to know more, email me at lsell@iwc.net. I'd be glad to send you the documents and reports related to the coffee project.

Thanks to all of you who have given support to Tierra Nueva in this past year. If you want to continue to support the work in Honduras, we have a very serious need for financial support at this time.

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.

God's peace to all of you,

Larry Sell