



COSECHA QUARTERLY

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COSECHA means *HARVEST* in Spanish

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Belize Update

Participants Slowly

Recovering from Hurricane Iris

Reporting from SHI-Belize, Extensionists Candido Chun and Bernabe Choc write that the Mayan villages are slowly recovering from devastating Hurricane Iris, the category 4 storm that slammed the Toledo District on October 8, 2001. SHI donors have been very generous with their contributions in the immediate aftermath of the hurricane. Extensionists have delivered black bean seeds and corn seeds to participants, who have already planted them.

With so much forest destroyed in the storm, however, recovery will not be easy. Starving wildlife are feeding on the newly replanted crops for lack of another food source. Cacao plantations suffered heavy damages, leaving farmers anxious for their incomes. In an effort to prevent catastrophic wildfires from slash-and-burn farming, the government has placed a temporary ban on burning. SHI extensionists are reinforcing this philosophy and are helping as many farmers as they can learn alternatives that will eliminate the need to burn.

SHI-Belize extensionists still need urgent assistance to help participants restore their lands. Your support will help save the Mayan villages of Toledo, Belize.

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An Important Note

SHI is in the process of updating our database in order to manage the organization more effectively. We therefore ask you to please let us know if there are any updates that you would like us to make (i.e. e-mail addresses to receive Bruce's exciting field notes!)

Also, although we have never shared SHI's list and have no immediate plans to do so, we may in the future engage in sharing, renting, trading or selling of the list in order to increase our donor base and expand SHI's work. If you do not wish to have your contact information made available for these purposes, please let us know. Please mail us your updates or e-mail us: info@sustainableharvest.org.

Drought Recovery in Honduras

SHI Donors Help Farmers Replant Crops



Young SHI participant harvesting a healthy carrot.

Thanks to the support of SHI donors, participating families have received desperately needed assistance to recover from a prolonged drought in Central America. SHI reported in September that last year's dry season lasted two months longer than normal, causing crops to fail.

Families throughout Central America faced starvation if something was not done to counter the drought's devastation.

Donors responded to SHI's request for additional support to help participants affected by the drought. Several months later, SHI's integrated approach to sustainable rural development has

helped participating families to replant their crops. Regional coordinator Yovany Munguia reports that in Honduras, families have benefited from both extensionist support as well as the new community banks established there.

SHI-Honduras participants in the Yoro Department in the northwestern region of the country were hit the hardest by the drought, where planting typically takes place in late June or early July. When the rains didn't come until August, many families had already lost most of their crops, causing food shortages. Participants in the Santa Barbara Department were not affected as severely.

Extensionists in Yoro quickly responded with fast-growing vegetable seeds for participants. Purchasing corn and bean seeds with loans from the community banks, participating families began replanting in November. Munguia reports that as of January 40 families have already harvested 35,000 pounds of the replanted beans from 30 acres of individual and collective plots and are making progress toward recovery from the drought.

Donor support has made it possible for SHI to combine its successful extensionist support with needed finan-



Extensionist and participants cultivating organic Tabasco peppers for sale.

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Extensionist Training

Gathering Brings SHI Staff Together



SHI-Honduras Extensionist Manuel Bueso holding up a beet harvested at the organic vegetable garden visited by extensionists on their "free day".

concentrates that improve soils.

Lectures on the history, basis, principals and movements in organic agriculture helped to deepen understanding of SHI's role in transforming agriculture practices. Agro-ecology, or "balanced agriculture", classes emphasized maintaining the equilibrium of diverse plants and animals found in nature. Several field trips to agro-ecology farms, including some nearly indistinguishable from natural forest, demonstrated the practice. At one such farm, extensionists built a biogas digester that converts manure into gas for cooking. With some country programs moving toward exporting products such as organic coffee, international and local marketing issues were also covered, particularly organic certification. Extensionists visited a cooperative made up of small-scale, mostly indigenous farmers that exports organic fruits and vegetables as well as organic cacao. After six long days at EARTH, extensionists chose to use their "free day" to visit an organic farm owned by a family that started with no financial resources or even land but now generates US \$4,000 monthly (a king's ransom by Central American standards!). This perfect ending for the training inspired everyone to redouble their efforts helping each of SHI's 500 participating families implement sustainable and profitable alternatives to

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From November 12-17th, SHI extensionists and US staff gathered at EARTH College in Costa Rica for the 3rd Annual Field Staff Training. Social commitment, environmental awareness, entrepreneurial mentality and the development of human values are the four pillars of EARTH College, founded in 1990 to foster sustainable development in the humid tropics.

Intensive and participation based, the training combined academic instruction with practical applications of organic agriculture techniques. Sessions lasted twelve hours or more with classes, hands-on practice and field trips. Extensionists and US staff

concluded the training with an in-depth evaluation of individual extensionists' work and SHI's program as a whole.

Starting with soils as the living base of existence, extensionists studied how to implement a biologically based model to foster sustainable agriculture as opposed to a chemically propped one. Field trips to degraded land sites and thriving organic vegetable gardens and banana plantations underscored the necessity of implementing sustainable methods. Hands were dirtied during classes on different varieties of compost and microorganism

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provides farmers and communities in the tropics with long-term assistance implementing environmentally and economically sustainable technologies. Our mission is to reverse environmental degradation by helping rural inhabitants restore ecological stability and sustainable economic productivity to overexploited lands.

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Thanks, and Enjoy!





Field Notes from Bruce Maanum

Nicaragua, November 2001



It's 6:30 in the morning, and a few of the blue, yellow and orange shops are creaking their rusty doors open. A light drizzle falls. It is the tail end of the wet season in Bluefields on the eastern coast of Nicaragua. I step over a mound of garbage left on the sidewalk and pull my hood over my head as it starts raining harder.

I am searching for supplies for a trip up the Kukra River to meet some folks who have asked for SHI's help. I walk toward one of the only shops that has what we need (bottled water, sardines, crackers, etc...). A big diesel truck is parked in front of it, and its exhaust points right at the open doors. I take a deep breath and try to buy provisions as quickly as possible.

But this is Bluefields. Nothing happens quickly here. All of the items are stacked on shelves behind the imposing counter. Two people are taking orders. It's harder to shoplift with this arrangement, true, but it also takes much longer to shop. I emerge from the store, goods in hand and feeling green from the fumes, and head down to the dock to meet SHI Extensionist Leonel Luna and SHI's President, Florence Reed.

We're off, our boat bouncing across the Bay of Bluefields. I turn to our guest, Gerardo, to ask him some questions. A fairly standard setting for meetings in the field, we have to yell in order to hear each other over the

outboard motor. Our hands shield us against the pelting rain.

Gerardo tells us that he knows the farmers in the area quite well through his work with a Dutch organization that started working in the Kukra River area about four years ago. For the first two and a half years, the organization mapped and assessed the area. They then hired Gerardo and others to work directly with the people for the last year and a half. Gerardo and the other staff taught the farmers sustainable agriculture and reforestation techniques. Gerardo says that many farmers are very interested in learning these new techniques, but that a

year and a half was not enough time to teach them.

The rain lets up as we leave the bay and the sun comes out. Heading up the Kukra River, the banks offer up a bouquet of late rainy season white and red blossoms. Kingfishers fly up and down the riverbanks. It's a good thing the scenery is nice because we enjoy it for over four hours.

After arriving, we take a walk around the community of La Aurora, surrounded by the Cerro Silva Humid Tropical Forest Nature Reserve. Many of the farmers in the area surrounding the village have recently turned to cattle grazing. Large areas in the protected forest reserve have been clear-cut for cattle pasture, contrasting sharply with the surrounding lush, tropical rainforest.

The farmers we talk to say that they know they are not supposed to cut down the trees, but they feel that they have no choice. They tell us that the other organization started teaching them about crop diversification and how to use the land without cutting more trees. Most of them want to continue with sustainable farming, but they need long-term assistance to do so. SHI will fill that need.

We spend the night and make several more farm visits the next day. After our

last visit, we are exhausted and eager to get back to Bluefields. We get into the boat, realizing that in order to make it back before dark, we needed to leave about an hour and a half ago. It starts to pour.

It gets really dark, really fast. I can't tell where the banks stop and the river begins. With every turn, it looks and feels as though we are going to ram into a wall of trees. I strain to see the bay. If we can just get to the bay. Bend after bend, each the same as the one before, the river keeps coming and the rain keeps pouring.

As is customary in the region, there are no personal floatation devices in the boat, or lights. Between clutching my jacket against the dumping rain and scooping water out of the boat, I scramble to find my flashlight. All too soon, I discover that the two AA batteries are not strong enough to illuminate the trees along the banks. We have to trust fate to keep us safe from ramming into the wall of trees and from snagging in the debris floating in the river, bend after bend after bend. After bend.

When the danger level gets to this point, I become philosophical.

I see a parallel between our predicament now and the lives of the farmers we have just met. Because they live in such a remote area, they receive very little assistance from the govern-

ment or other organizations. Medical care, education and social support are severely lacking.

They are in a boat with no life preservers or lights heading down a winding, dangerous river in the dark.

As I think this, the horizon appears to be slightly more uniform. The bay! The lights of Bluefields beckon us to shore. My flashlight now plays an important role. Although it is not strong enough to illuminate our path, I shine it back and forth every couple minutes so that any approaching boat will, we hope, take note of us and not run us down.

Safe and sound, albeit soaked and cold, we reach the shore.

Epilogue: Since our harrowing trip down the river, Leonel has started working with 25 families in the Kukra River area. Your generous support will offer the light of sustainability to guide them down the river.

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Annual Extensionist Training Held at EARTH College

SHI recently held its Annual Extensionist Training at EARTH University. SHI Extensionists, President Florence Reed and Vice President for Programs Bruce Maanum are pictured at right with new customized tee shirts and bags donated by Blue Dolphin Screen Print and Embroidery and Bailey Works, businesses located in the Seacoast Region of NH.

For details about the training, look inside!

