



La Cosecha

The Harvest

Sustainable Harvest International
Fall 2003

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Visit to Belize

Account by board member
Jerry Kelly of his visit to
Belize with his family

Nine in the morning on Belize's coastal plain, and the dark, rich earth is steaming after a nighttime downpour that signals the early rumblings of the rainy season. Candido Chun, SHI's lead extensionist in Belize, and I are standing by a large experimental garden just outside Punta Gorda, the district center. Long rows of vegetables alternate with single files of a wide variety of newly planted fruit trees. The alternating rows are distanced so that the trees will provide some shade for each new vegetable crop under this tropic sun. The Garifuna (Black Carib) family engaged in this experiment is optimistic about the early success at growing a wider variety of garden vegetables for home use and for sale at their "cool spot," the small store that they run by the roadside.

This is my second visit with Candido, two summers after my first views of SHI projects in Belize's Toledo District, an area that I have been visiting since 1990 as a member of a University of New Hampshire teacher program. Our tour is particularly significant because Toledo suffered a tremendous amount of storm damage from Hurricane Iris in 2001. Candido tells me that a marvelous experimental plot of organic cacao, shaded by young bananas, that we visited two years before was totally wiped off the hilltop in Mafredi, an East Indian community.

Our next stop is another small farm at the foot of a steep hill. The great variety of plants and the high level of

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Mayan children in Belize playing in front of their organically grown seedlings

Make a Difference! Throw a party?

Find out what you can do
to have your own SHI
fund-raising event!

Some of our friends are finding creative and fun ways to raise funds and awareness for SHI. Most recently, board member Rhett Currier hosted her second SHI event, a fund-raising cocktail party. The event was a huge success and raised \$3,020.00 that will provide long-term assistance to families that are fighting to reverse poverty and deforestation in the tropics. "My guests were inspired by SHI's work, were happy to open up their checkbooks, and thanked me for the opportunity!" commented Rhett after the event.

We would like to encourage

others to follow Rhett's lead and hold their own fund raising event. There are countless fun and easy activities that people of all ages can do to support SHI. You could hold an SHI dinner, yard sale, concert, dance, car wash, golf tournament, road race or craft fair.

Be creative and design your own SHI fund-raiser! We would be happy to send you a Powerpoint presentation with notes to help you explain SHI's work to others. If a member of SHI's staff has plans to be in your area they can also give a presentation at your event. Our new Development Director, Sarah Kennedy, would love to work with any groups or individuals interested in holding fund-raisers. Please e-mail Sarah at info@sustainableharvest.org to get your event rolling!

Highlights of Honduras

Sarah Kennedy tells of her trip to Honduras with friend, Julia Monley, where they learned what Sustainable Agriculture is all about.

After doing volunteer work in Nicaragua for 2 months and before heading home to Maine to start work in Sustainable Harvest International's new office, I had the opportunity to visit SHI's

“The children visualize their accomplishments as their plants grow”



Third graders in Santa Barbara where sustainable agriculture has become part of the curriculum.

Honduras program and get a first hand glimpse of the organization's work in the field.

Upon arrival, SHI extensionists Juan Carlos Sandres and Jacobo Suazo take Julia Monley and me far into the mountain communities of their work areas to introduce us to the families they serve. We start in the city of Azacualpa, a municipality in the province of Santa Barbara, near the Guatemalan border. We wake up early and hop on the back of Jacobo and Juan Carlos's motorcycles which bear us out of town and up into the mountain villages of Nueva Frontera. I have to squint to keep the dirt out of my eyes, but I can still see campesinos waving and shouting greetings as we speed by. We soon learn why the SHI workers are a friendly and welcome sight to these hard-working people.

Our first stop is at a small adobe house where Jacobo has been working with a family to build a

biogas digester. Its soft plastic tube is filled with manure and other organic materials that decompose in an anaerobic setting and produce methane gas. The gas fuels the family's stove, decreasing the need to burn wood, thus cutting down on deforestation. The wife proudly shows us into her kitchen where she prepares breakfast on the stove each morning. Shortly after breakfast, her children head off to school and her husband to the fields. Before the family's involvement with SHI, their meals consisted mainly of rice and beans alone. With Jacobo's help they have now added nutritious fruits and vegetables to their diet.

We next head to the local school where SHI is playing a role in improving the lives and diets of the 200 students and their families. Jacobo and Juan Carlos explain to us the importance of working with the younger generations to ensure the future of the community. “The children teach their parents what they see in school,” Jacobo explains. With the support of the parents, teachers and SHI workers, the students have built a tree nursery. In the classroom they are learning about reforestation and working hands-on with the extension workers to plant seeds and make organic pesticides. “The children visualize their accomplishments as their plants grow,” comments one teacher at the school in Santa Barbara

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Participant family in Los Amates stands among their diverse crop of chiles, mahogany, pineapple and yuca.

We spend the rest of the afternoon visiting SHI families, who proudly show us their diverse selections of fruits and vegetables. We see fields where corn, beans, watermelon, coffee, peppers, passion fruit, carrots, onions, radishes, cassava, tomatoes and squash are all growing together. Juan Carlos and Jacobo explain to us that now that the farmers are intercropping, they are providing their families with important nutrients as well as bringing a larger variety of goods to market. We meet many farmers who are working with the extensionists to convert to only organic means of insect control and to create natural erosion control barriers with rows of pineapple, valeriana (a plant used to brew medicinal tea) and nitrogen-rich trees.

...families are able to improve their health and quality of their crops without sacrificing their control over production.

Julia and I are impressed by the level at which SHI is involved with the community members. The extensionists work **with** the farmers to determine their needs. We see that families are improving their health and the quality of their crops without sacrificing their control over production. Julia reflects that, "The people of SHI are very sensitive to the ideas and desires of the people they work with. The families I have met really appreciate this."

Every donation to SHI touches the lives of countless individuals. Participants are eating better, growing more diverse and profitable crops, and most importantly, ensuring that future generations will continue to benefit from their progress.

Are these Chickens Smiling?



Probably, after moving into their new *gallinero*, or coop. Elio Lopez and Eda Castro have a new addition in their backyard. It's a gallinero that houses their 30 chickens. SHI extension worker Jorge Rodriguez has been working on this project in La Laguna, Honduras over the past year. SHI provides the materials to build the coops as well as the technical support and information the families need to turn their flocks into a sustainable part of their farms. Not only do the chickens provide eggs, but they provide manure that Elio uses to organically fertilize his beans. Now that the flock has a home, they are less susceptible to diseases and predators, they are laying more eggs and are fed well by the scraps from the garden.

The \$45 needed to fund Elio and Eda's coop was part of a generous donation from Tony Banegas and the Rotary Club of North Phoenix, AZ, who sponsored the construction of a total of 25 coops in Honduras. Tony is a native of Honduras and says that he supports SHI because our projects benefit families and communities over a long period of time. He stated, "The idea of the gallineros is very appealing to me because it not only helps our



The Castro Lopez family and SHI extensionist, Jose Rodriguez in front of the new Gallinero.

people to eat healthier, but it may provide a source of income. **In a way, we are teaching them to fish (chickens) which will lead to self-sufficiency."**

More than 400 families are requesting the support to build gallineros and improve their flocks. SHI would like to be able to assist all of these families, but we need your help! Each donation of \$45.00 sponsors the technical support and materials necessary to build one gallinero for a needy family. Please send your contribution today!

experimentation are impressive, particularly the newly constructed pig shed. (Penning swine is a much-needed cultural change in the region so as to avoid the diseases spread by free range pigs.) Here, the farmer is preparing for biogas generation, a sure-fire method to avoid tree cutting on the vulnerable, steep slopes that tower over the farm.

Next we visit Laguna, a stunning Mayan village eight miles inland. Candido is planning a farm-visit day later that week in order to bring together representatives from all the families that he is working with in four communities, so that they might all visit the Laguna SHI sites, compare notes, and share a chicken caldo (stew) prepared by the village members. First, we inspect an old, overgrown cacao grove that one farmer is pruning and replanting in a changeover to organic production. Next, we stop to walk through a former horse and cattle field that is being replanted with 800 hardwood trees, part of a long range effort at village reforestation. After a few more family visits, we go to see the model garden at the local elementary school. One last home garden we see can only be 20 ft x20 ft, but as Valeria, the daughter, names the various fruits and vegetables, I lose count somewhere over 30 varieties.

Variety is also the hallmark of our final stop, an organic gem in Mafredi Village. Burton Calis is one of a small number of local farmers who have been experimenting with organic agriculture and silvaculture (tree farming) for many years. Our host is proud not only of his extremely wide variety of fruits and vegetables, but

also of his extensive composting operation. He shows us the special pits he has built over a decade and schools us in the fine points of tropical composting. As we sit enjoying black mangoes and fresh orange juice, I am struck by the wide range of insect and

hard-work, the traditional respect for the land, and a great resiliency that allows them to bounce back from setbacks such as Hurricane Iris. I trust that SHI donors can not only feel assured about the practical value of their donations, but also know that innovation, cooperation, and small investments are beginning to ensure sustainable harvests in Southern Belize.

Jerry Kelly
SHI Founding Board Member



Patricia Ack, from Laguna Village in Southern Belize, stands proudly among her organic vegetables.

bird life that testifies to the benign form of farming that is practiced on this site. As an SHI board member and long-term visitor to the region, I am particularly struck by Candido's deliberate outreach to work with members of all the various ethnic groups in the region, a significant statement since some organizations tend to focus their efforts on only one ethnic community. Even our short excursion has allowed us to see the well-considered appropriateness of the various projects that Candido and the other extensionists have introduced in their home areas. Not only are these different model projects functioning well, but each one is affordable and can be replicated by other farmers such as the ones who will be touring the SHI projects in Laguna. Candido and so many of the local farmers possess a wonderful attitude that encompasses

A New Face at SHI

In addition to moving our United States Headquarters to Maine, we have added a Mainer to the Sustainable Harvest staff. Sarah Kennedy has just stepped up to the challenge of being SHI's new Development Director. Her first duty has been the creation of the newsletter you are reading (please feel free to let her know what you think!). After seeing SHI's work first hand in Honduras, Sarah is very excited to help SHI grow by raising awareness and increasing funding. Sarah is very pleased to be working with an organization dedicated to helping people help themselves.



Honduran extension worker, Manuel Antonio Bueso, and SHI's new Development Director, Sarah Kennedy

La Cosecha KIDS CORNER

Grow Your Own Avocado Tree

SHI farmers all over Central America enjoy delicious organic avocados. Avocados, or *aguacate* (a-gwa-kah-tay) in Spanish, contain vitamins E, C and B6. Not only are they delicious and nutritious, but they are FUN TO GROW!!! Just follow these easy steps.



GUACAMOLE!

Traditionally, Guacamole is made with mashed ripe avocados, salt and lime juice, but you can **SPICE IT UP**:

For the guacamole base you need:

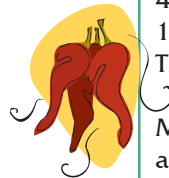
- 4 ripe avocados
- 1/4 teaspoon of salt
- The juice from one ripe lime

Mash together the peeled and pitted avocado, salt and lime juice in a bowl.

Now for the fun part! Add any combination of the following to create your own unique guacamole.

1 Diced tomato, 1/4 cup diced green pepper, 1/4 teaspoon ground cumin, 1 crushed clove of garlic, 1/4 cup minced onion, fresh cilantro, 1/4 cup chopped chives or scallions

If you really want to spice things up, throw in some fresh hot chile peppers or a dash of tabasco. Serve your guacamole with tortillas, chips, veggies or on a sandwich! The avocado fun never ends!





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La Cosecha is printed on recycled paper using soy-based inks. Enjoy it and pass it on!

La Cosecha is a publication of Sustainable Harvest International (SHI), a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. Sustainable Harvest International is building a global network of local partners working toward environmental, economic and social sustainability. SHI facilitates long-term collaboration among trained local staff, farmers and communities to implement sustainable land-use practices that alleviate poverty by restoring ecological stability. All donations to SHI are tax-deductible.

SHI would like to thank you, our supporters. With your help we have assisted over 670 farmers and 50 schools in 75 communities in Honduras, Panamá, Belize and Nicaragua plant more than 900,000 trees and save more than 40,000 acres from slash-and-burn destruction. We hope that you enjoy this edition of the Cosecha. Please continue to support our efforts to help families reverse rainforest destruction with sustainable land-use practices that allow them to take control of their environmental and economic destinies. Cut out and keep the below bookmark as a small token of our gratitude for your ongoing support!

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Thank you!



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