

**Partners of the Americas
Farmer-to-Farmer Trip Report**

**Wisconsin/Nicaragua: Institutional Strengthening for Associations
Cooperatives and Agriculture Education Centers
June 28- July 12, 2003**

Joint Trip Report: Yvonne Horton and John Preissing

Executive Summary

Yvonne Horton and John Preissing participated in a two-week volunteer assignment to Nicaragua in early July 2003. The purpose of the visit was to provide support to rural institutions, particularly the national agrarian university – Universidad Nacional Agraria (UNA) in strategic planning and institutional development. Prior to their visit there had been a series of volunteers to UNA to work on extension program development and on facilitation skill building from Wisconsin. Through the Partners programs, a number of UNA professionals have also been to Wisconsin to work on enhancing their skills. Ing. Agr. Sandra Lovo, the director of UNA's international programs office, requested the volunteer's assistance to provide overall support for UNA's strategic planning work and for her unit, DICOEX. We were also asked to assist in preparing a case study on the impacts of the Farmer-to-Farmer support in a pilot community, Las Lagunas.

Significant accomplishments while we were in Nicaragua included five major presentations to a total 100 UNA faculty, staff, and students on strategic planning, program development, the University of Wisconsin Extension system, community development, and UWEX's international strategic plan. We held in-depth one-on-one sessions with approximately 10 campus professionals. Considerable time was spent learning more about the university structure and the ongoing planning efforts at UNA. A case study was completed on Farmer to Farmer's work in Las Lagunas, a small rural community outside of Boaco. We believe that the international department also has a clearer direction on ways to strengthen their unit – via planning and focusing on core activities.

For the future, we recommend that UNA's main campus consider working with agribusiness faculty in curriculum development and agriculture marketing, that the TISMA project be pursued, but in smaller components, and that volunteers be sent to work more in depth with UNA's branch campus located in Juigalpa. Resource development expertise from Wisconsin's universities and encouraging low cost and no cost graduate student research projects are also recommended. Last, for additional case studies and evaluation work, we recommend using the Logic Framework. Training on this approach and conducting the analysis will no doubt prove to be beneficial.

Background

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this visit was to strengthen the managerial leadership capacity of Nicaraguan agricultural organizations, cooperatives, educational institutions, and agriculture projects through training in strategic planning and program development. This training will permit them to have clear and viable missions for the development of agriculture activities, accompanied by participatory mechanisms that result in more effective and sustainable efforts. The primary beneficiary was the National Agrarian University (UNA).

Proposed results included:

- Clearly identify the mission and strategic plan of the institutions related to the educational and economic development of the agriculture sector of the community,
- Evaluate the monitoring/reporting systems of the institutions, associations and cooperatives related to the agriculture development in the country, and
- Strengthen institutional management of the different planning offices of organizations and institutions related to agriculture development in the country.

Activities/Results

Primary assistance was provided to Universidad Nacional Agraria, UNA, under the coordination of Ing. Agr. Sandra Lovo

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Over a two-week period we met with faculty of UNA on various topics. We provided formal presentations and also had informal dialogues with the faculty about their departments and special projects.

Our first group meeting of Institutional Coordinators of UNA included 10 people (4 women and 6 men). The presentation on Outreach, Public Service and Community Development at UWEX was presented by the volunteer team and translated by John Preissing. This presentation provided an overview of University of Wisconsin-Extension structure and an overview of how we do our work.

Some time was spent with the Director of Planning Ricardo Araica, for an interchange on his preparation for strategic planning. Ricardo shared his role and his upcoming opportunity to work with a consultant on an institutional plan, over the next 3 months.

We reviewed the UWEX program planning process and logic model with Ricardo in response to his request for a design to measure outcomes of departmental curriculum.

A meeting of 4 of the faculty (4 men) of the rural development department brought about a discussion of institutional relations as it relates to the TISMA project. The TISMA project is an ambitious attempt by the Rural Development Faculty to strengthen their extension outreach capacity and to provide students with relevant field-based experiences in community development. To achieve this aim, significant collaboration with UWEX and the Wisconsin Partners Chapter is envisioned.

We had a frank discussion about UWEX's capacity to support a major international development undertaking – that is, we are not equipped to fully support such an endeavor. However, we thought the project was worthwhile and made a number of suggestions on how the faculty could proceed. We recommended that they might want to collaborate with an Agribusiness department in the states to explore curriculum and rural development program structures in Wisconsin. They may also find assistance and support in the practicum field experiences for students. It was recommended that the TISMA project be broken up into logical sections for manageability and fundability.

In another meeting with the faculty of the rural development department, a workshop was conducted on UWEX program planning and community development (4 women, 11 men). We specifically addressed how we do our work in Wisconsin and we had a good dialogue with the 15 members of the faculty in attendance.

Dr. Freddy Aleman, Coordinator of Extension, Research and Postgraduate Studies at UNA shared local programs and challenges. He expressed a need to strengthen the grant writing skills of the faculty. He also spoke of the dearth of research opportunities for students that limit their ability to complete their graduate programs.

Another presentation was given to a small group of deans on UWEX's program planning process and our International Program Strategic Plan. The eight in attendance were motivated to discuss how their office of External Cooperation could strengthen its relationship with faculty (4 women and 4 men). Some of the suggestions will be folded into their strategic plan.

Yvonne had an opportunity to pay a courtesy visit to Leonard Fagot at USAID to share our recent experiences. Leonard Fagot is the program manager and technical officer for various projects in Managua. During that visit we learned about the marketing efforts of the coffee growers in Nicaragua, and USAID's regional strategy. Leonard Fagot also spoke about the future of the faith-based market for coffee. Dr. Steve Olive, Oficina de Comercio y Agronegocios was also introduced.

John had an opportunity to present a training session to 45 students studying agronomy at UNA's branch campus in Juigalpa. They were juniors and seniors, a few local cooperative leaders, and approximately five faculty members. Following the program, a field tour of the campus took place. Ing. Agr. Esperanza Castro Castillo, the campus

director, noted that they are highly interested in additional activities at the branch campus with Farmer-to-Farmer.

We held numerous one-on-one meetings with Sandra Lovo, the Director of External Cooperation on her job role and how she connects with the faculty of UNA. We walked through a process to identify her specific job functions to clarify her job roles and create a position description. The position has as its focus resource development and external relations including coordinating international programs.

In addition to our efforts with UNA, we spent a day with Ronald Blandon, local Farmer-to-Farmer Coordinator. Ronald wanted us to visit Las Lagunas and prepare a case study of our findings. Ing. Agr. Edith Mendez Villanueva accompanied us on this case study. She is a Nicaraguan national and a recent graduate from CATIE in natural resource economics. Our report is attached.

Follow-Up

From our visit we developed a number of specific future volunteer support requests and some action items. The requests for volunteer support includes expertise in the following areas for UNA:

1. Agribusiness
2. Marketing
3. Resource Development
4. Curriculum Development, particularly for modules in business simulations
5. Exchange of low and no cost research projects
6. Intensive gardening, appropriate technology, community development, and facilitation skills for students and faculty working at the UNA branch campus in Juigalpa.

Other action items include:

1. Assist the UNA visiting faculty members that will be traveling to Wisconsin through the next year with the USAID Mentoring project located at UW River Falls. Two people arrive in August and another four in January 2004.
2. Provide Dr. Freddy Aleman with information on the International Association of Agricultural Extension website.

Comments

Yvonne

I found the Farmer-to-Farmer program an excellent vehicle to not only contribute my skills as an experienced extension educator-but also to improve these skills for my work with the university. I found faculty at UNA to be sincere and appreciative of our contributions. This was my first experience with the Farmer-to-Farmer program, and I am eager for a continued relationship. Some of our most interesting and rewarding experiences were outside our “formal” campus interactions.

John

This was my third opportunity to travel to Nicaragua through the Farmer-to-Farmer program since 1998. I was impressed, as always, with the hospitality and desires to improve Nicaraguan society by the professionals that I worked with. Yvonne also added considerably to the team through her experience in institutional development and extension program development.

Overall Comments

- We found the groups wonderful to work with. It was also noteworthy how the local Partners Office, the Local Farmer to Farmer Coordinator (Ronald Blandon), and our local project host (Ing. Agr. Sandra Lovo) work mightily under challenging circumstances.
- For future visits related to UNA we might cautiously recommend that more time at the branch campuses or on project visits would be time well spent. A challenge with working on campus is that most of the hosts are also in the midst of incredibly busy work schedules.
- Further development of the case study approach, using the Logic Framework, may provide Farmer to Farmer and UNA with good information on their proposed or actual project interventions.
- Our hosts and we found it mutually beneficial to have a team of two to work on issues. Being able to draw upon the experiences of two people was advantageous. Also, having a colleague that spoke Spanish was valuable.