

**Partners of the Americas
Farmer-to-Farmer Program
August 15, - September 1, 2003
Comunidad de Chimborazo / Asactus / Balkashi, Ecuador**

Trip Report

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Executive Summary

The three communities I visited had a varied amount of community resources and past projects underway. In Comunidad de Chimborazo other support groups had provided or started projects to improve living conditions. A canal for irrigation was functioning, a community cheese plant operated, a school and medical clinic was partially used, as was a newer facility with green house, hostel, and community room which was partially used to serve the community. Trout ponds were partially dug but not functional at this time. The original hacienda was not being used, and even though it was outdated could be partially functional. A women's group was knitting sweaters and hoping to export their products. Asactus had provided living quarters for the Peace Corp Volunteer (PCV) next to its community center and soccer field. The water supply was more intermittent here, but the PCV had projects going with a potato plot for disease resistance, Guinea pig operations, and other agronomical projects on inoculants, fertility and crop management. Balkashi was able to irrigate their vegetable crops, had a corn plot in full growth and an active farmer group looking for ways to improve their income and livelihood.

As all three communities were interested in improving their dairy production, classes and hands-on demonstrations were given to improve their skills and improve milk yield.

Comunidad de Chimborazo

Classroom instruction was given to 15-18 students. Six to eight hours of instruction were given covering the need for more water for animals, increased pasture consumption, understanding the lactation curve, the need to control internal and external parasites, and general sanitation. Twenty dairy animals were vaccinated for Brucellosis, Leptospirosis and Septicemia. Twenty-nine cows and heifers were taped to determine body size and then treated for internal and external parasites.

Asactus

Individual instruction was given to 20 people on the need to control parasites to improve milk production and animal health. Ten dairy animals were given injections to control internal and external parasites. Producers were given hands on experience in determining body size by using tape measure and then taught how to draw medicine in a syringe and give a subcutaneous injection. One formal meeting was scheduled but few attended because of a couple of family celebrations that were taking place at the same time.

Balkashi

There was a formal group of 11-13 farmers who received six to eight hours of dairy instruction in this community. These farmers received training on controlling parasites, the importance of increasing pasture quantity and quality, providing adequate water and increasing energy levels of diets especially at the start of the lactation. Five different farmers learned how to determine size and give the shots to reduce internal and external parasites in their dairy animals. However, there was a large interest in artificial insemination at this site, which was discouraged until other production practices were improved to increase their financial position.

The following recommendations and projects were developed during the trip to these three communities.

1. The need to control parasites was very evident. Each community should develop a plan to jointly purchase and treat their dairy animals on a regular basis. Preferably every 3-4 months as the close grazing and lack of cold period to kill worms causes a persistent parasite problem. The parasite control program should be encouraged in their pigs, sheep and other livestock as possible.
2. As most animals need to be constrained to administer the animal health product a community chute should be built to provide an adequate and safe place to perform this operation.
3. Once the above chute is built a natural step would be to encourage vaccination of animals as Ecuador has many diseases that are not controlled. Brucellosis, and Foot and Mouth disease to mention just a couple.
4. Ways to increase pasture consumption, improve availability of water, and increase the lactation both yield and duration needs to be reinforced by the PCV.
5. Fertility recommendations should be made based on the soil samples / test taken on this visit to these sites.

Background

A previous PCV had spent a great deal of time encouraging parasite control in two of these areas. As this procedure provides the most immediate and observable response major emphasis was placed on why, how, and the return to this production practice. Providing more nutrition by allowing cattle to graze more area, access to water more often or with a large quantity were discussed at length. Even something as simple as making the tether longer and providing water twice a day instead of once was encouraged. The plan to build facilities to give shots and then purchase medicine jointly were encouraged as each farmer were only given medicine for one or two of their animals and encouraged to do the rest of their animals on their own. Two soil samples were taken at each site to determine the need for fertilizer to improve crops and pasture in each area. The results will be emailed back to the PCV to let Jonathan Haskett, who is a soil scientist make the most accurate recommendations based on local conditions and availability of products.

Activities / Results

The following Peace Corp Volunteers provided translations and will be encouraging adoption of practices and techniques used to improve animal health and milk production specifically. Melissa Foster, Comunidad de Chimborazo, beebopfoster@yahoo.com Jonathan Haskett, Asactus, jhaskett@mindspring.com and Tim Sullivan, Balkashi.

Technical assistance was provide in the following areas:

1. Six to eight hours of classroom instruction on dairy production was given at Comunidad de Chimborazo to 15-18 farmers. At Balkashi 11-13 farmers received a similar amount of classroom instruction.
2. Farm visits were used to demonstrate using the tape measure to determine size of animal and how to give Subcutaneous shots for control of parasites and vaccinations. Comunidad de Chimborazo 15 farm visits, Asactus 10 farm visits, and Balkashi 5 farm visits.
3. Women were included at all three sites. Four women attended class at Chimborazo, two women attended class at Balkashi. About half of the farm visits in Asactus involved the women as many of the men were away working and the women milked the cows anyway.

Generally there was a lack of understanding of basic animal husbandry. The classroom instruction tried to provide basic information on nutrition and discourage giving vitamin shots when the basics of water, pasture (forage), energy (grain), minerals, and protein should be provided first. Almost all the animals carried a large load of parasites, both internal and external. In fact, a couple of smaller animals were refused treatment for parasites because they were in such bad shape that there was concern the animal might die from the treatment.

As I was leaving Riobamba to go to Quito Melissa said that two of the farmers in the first area had mentioned how the animals were looking better already. Jonathan mentioned that the farmers in Asactus were planning on buying more medicine to control parasites and he was planning on giving shots to a few more animals on farms we had not visited while I was in the area. The farm visits where the farmer helped measure the animals and then give the medicine with an injection helped the farmer get over any concern about being able to determine dosage and administer the shot. Hopefully, just having the experience once can get some people moving in the right direction on animal health issues.

Follow-up

The PCV have several activities to follow up on to keep this project on task.

1. Visit each farm that participated in the classroom discussion or farm visits. Lists were made of each farm and animal that received treatment. Viewing each animal that was treated and either visually observing an improvement or measuring the animal with the tape measure to let the farmer see weight gain.
2. Encourage group purchase of medicine and / or vaccines to be given to all the animals on a scheduled basis. The next time would be in November.
3. Determine the need and interest in building a chute to constrain the animals for receiving shot and build the facility if the group decided to proceed.
4. Encourage more pasture and water to be given by fencing, a longer tether, or more access to water.
5. Discuss the desire for better genetics by purchasing a bull jointly or exploring artificial insemination in Balkashi.

Comments

This was the first time outside the United States for me. Several people had given me advice but until I arrived and actually experienced it myself I was unprepared for the many changes that I would have to make in my daily routine. The sanitation standards were much less than I had anticipated, both in personal hygiene and in their food system. Also I was so excited to go that after the first site I was drained emotionally and physically and needed some time to regroup and think about what the possibilities really were in Ecuador. I think many people thought this was some kind of glorified vacation and when I came home they understood that it was work, mentally, physically and emotionally. The people treated me with utmost respect and grace, yet their ability to change their paradigms and production practices were greatly limited by their experience and educational background. This was a great experience for me, but not something I would want to do soon as it will take some time to comprehend everything that happened. I hope just a few of these wonderful people can change enough to improve their lives ever so slightly and yet not lose their peacefulness and calmness that they have now.