

**Farmer to Farmer – Nicaragua
Monitoring and Evaluation Trip Report
March 14-20, 2010**

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The purpose of this trip was to follow up on Partners of the Americas (POA) Farmer to Farmer (FTF) program's monitoring and evaluation systems and tools, make recommendations for improvements and assess training and other M&E needs for the in-country staff. Specifically, this involved:

- Clarifying hosts and ensuring consistency in naming hosts in data collection, F2Fnet and volunteer reports
- Becoming acquainted with host organizations, the assistance volunteers are providing and the changes hosts have seen or expect to see from FTF
- Helping in-country staff establish a data collection plan that fits with project logic models and host relational map (M&E Plan)
- Reviewing volunteer trip report guidelines and discussing how the country staff are extracting and using data from these reports; recommending ways to improve/simplify the trip report guidelines
- Identifying specific information that will be useful for evaluation studies in 2011 and 2013 (apart from USAID indicators and annex information)

This report includes a description of activities and methodologies used; discussion and agreement points; key issues; other observations; next steps; recommendations; and a list of annexes that are attached separately.

I would like to thank Ronald Blandón Bustamante, Country Coordinator, and Daniel Ingram Miranda, Field Officer, for hosting this visit, setting up meetings and field visits with host organizations, actively participating in M&E exercises, and for increasing my understanding of the dairy sector industry and the Farmer to Farmer program in Nicaragua. I would also like to thank the new program assistant, Agnes Chavarria, for participating in the field work and group M&E exercises in the office, and for giving me a female gender perspective of the dairy industry and economic development in Nicaragua. Also, I'm grateful to the entire team for allowing me an opportunity to enjoy some of the small pleasures of their beautiful country.

Thanks also to Jessie Kalsmith, POA Program Officer, for acting as a translator, providing me with important background information about the FTF program in Nicaragua and for playing a facilitative role in the process of developing the Nicaragua country M&E plan.

Sunday, 3/14/2010

My flight from Chicago to Miami was delayed and I missed the connecting flight to Managua. I arrived at the Ramada Inn at 11pm and spent the night in Miami.

Monday, 3/15/2010

I left Miami at noon and arrived in Nicaragua at 1pm and was met by Jessie and Daniel at the airport. My bag did not arrive so I had to wait in line to file a claim. We drove to the Don Quijote hotel to check in and then a local restaurant to get some lunch. We discussed the field trip Jessie and Daniel had taken that morning to meet with some faculty members from UNA Camoapa, *technicos* from Maseguito Cooperative, and dairy farmers from San Francisco de Asis Cooperative. They gave brief feedback of their visit.

We then discussed some questions I had regarding documentation of regular monitoring activities and follow-up of volunteer assistance/recommendations. We also had a conversation about flex assignments with regards to M&E. These topics are discussed in more detail under the heading 'key issues' later in this report.

Meeting with Peace Corps

At 4:00pm I accompanied Jessie, Ronald and Daniel to a meeting with the Peace Corps Director of Agriculture to discuss potential collaboration with FTF. An idea presented was that a Peace Corps volunteer could provide some consistency and support to host organizations and help them follow through with FTF recommendations over their longer term assignments (normally 2 years). This could also help monitoring and evaluation efforts as there would be someone to oversee and document changes that take place as a result of FTF on a regular basis. Peace Corps volunteers could also potentially play a role in proposing future FTF volunteer assignments based on the changing needs of the host. The director explained the different types of projects Peace Corps volunteers had been involved with and showed us some information, education and communication (IEC) materials they had developed. He explained how the host would need to go about applying for a Peace Corps volunteer.

Tuesday, 3/16/2010

The day was spent in the FTF office in Managua with Jessie, Daniel and Agnes.

Purpose of M&E

I explained to Daniel and Agnes a bit about my role and the role of UWEX in helping to set up an effective and sustainable M&E system. I asked them questions about: 1. The type of work FTF volunteers are doing or have done so far (Qué?); 2. Who participates in volunteer activities (Quién?); and 3. What difference has it made or do they expect it to make (Y qué?) I explained that throughout the visit I would be asking: *Y qué?* = 'So what?', to get everyone thinking about how the various FTF assignments/activities will lead to the intended outcomes of the project. We also revisited the project logic model and host relational map that was developed during Larry Jones' visit in October 2009.

Review of 'Next Steps' from Larry Jones' report

Daniel explained that he had collected all of the host baseline data and profile information and had them in a folder. He had just not had time to enter them into F2Fnet. I worked with him on entering some of the data into F2Fnet so that he became more comfortable with it. There seemed to be a slight glitch in the system as the session automatically ended when "save" was clicked.

Clarification of Hosts

We all agreed that the host needed to be level where change is expected to take place. We revisited the host relational map.

Farmer groups: We made a list of all of the hosts that were receiving technical assistance in milk production and quality and which "group" they fit into. We also clarified

the name of the farmer group and how they will be labeled in F2Fnet as well as volunteer reports. The information recorded on the baseline form is a compilation (average) of all the farmers in the farmer group. However, as agreed in Larry Jones' visit, dairy annexes will still be filled out for each individual farmer in the group.*

We then made a table listing all of the host names by host type/objective (host relational map) and compared it to what is in F2Fnet.*

We then assisted Daniel in compiling information of individual farmers into baseline survey form for each farmer group and entering this into F2Fnet.

Dairy development service industry

There were 6 hosts under this host type in the host relational map including universities and *technicos*. We discussed how information about universities would be collected as much as possible from the baseline forms, but most of the information would have to come from the university annex. A concern was raised regarding the *technicos* being listed as hosts. Jessie and Daniel both agreed that *technicos* are a part of the cooperatives, and therefore should not be listed as separate hosts. We therefore removed them from the dairy development service industry but kept the arrow showing the relationship between the universities and the cooperatives as many of the *technicos* are graduates of the university and attend the same FTF volunteer workshops as university students and faculty.

Processing, Collection and Distribution

For this host type, Daniel said that the information collected on the baseline forms would be exactly the same as the information collected for the general coop/association or company. We decided it would be more efficient to just collect baseline on the coop/association/company as a whole, which would include the collection, processing and distribution information. Both of these host types have been color coded in blue to identify them as just one host, even though there would be technical assistance provided in organizational development as well as specific processing, collection and distribution.

It would be useful to collect specific information on processing, collection and distribution that is not covered in the baseline form or the dairy annex. One way to do this is to modify the dairy annex to include more information such as: transportation, handling of equipment, mixing of milk from different farmers, milk storage, hygiene and sanitation practices, etc.

We discussed more about the flex assignments and added three hosts to the host list that had received FTF volunteers in the horticulture sub-sector. Jessie said baseline data would need to be collected for all of these, but was not sure to what extent. She will discuss with Peggy. Daniel said he will continue to do follow up visits with these hosts even if they only receive support from one or two volunteers.

Went to lunch at Comida a la Vista and discussed more about program.

* After return, Jessie discussed this list with Peggy and they decided it would be better to list the farmers as individual farmers, and note their affiliation with the specific coop/association. This is because the farmers do not operate as a group, so it will be necessary to measure their individual changes.

Left office at 3:45 to pick up Kerry's luggage at the airport. We then had a meeting with a faculty member at UNA-Managua. Daniel asked him to fill out the university annex and explained what the information would be used for.

We went to dinner and returned to hotel at 8:30pm.

Wednesday, 3/17/2010

Daniel, Agnes and Lesvy (son of host Miguel Burgos) picked Jessie and I up at the hotel at 5:30am. We drove to San Jose de los Remates collection site to observe how it works. We met the farmers carrying their milk from their farms to the collection site on horses and pouring the milk into collection tanks.



Figure 1: Transporting milk from the farm to the collection site



Figure 2: San Jose de los Remates collection center (not a host)

We then drove to a farm in San Jose de los Remates owned by an individual private farmer, Miguel Burgos. The farm is situated up a rocky, muddy, hilly path that is very difficult to walk on. We watched the grinding of foliage and observed the cows. According to Daniel, this farmer has approximately 50 cows.



Miguel Burgos said the best thing FTF has done for him so far is to recommend mixing minerals with feed, and spreading it around so that the cows have more access to it. He was also advised to start feeding minerals to the calves while they are still young in order to improve their health. These were recommendations made by volunteer John Cockrell.

Figure 3 (left): Grinding feed at Miguel Burgos' farm at San Jose de los Remates. Miguel is a FTF host (individual farmer).

After the visit, we drove to Camoapa to hear Ronald speak about FTF at the national dairy forum. Two questions I found interesting that were asked during the forum were:

1. One person stood up and said that the poverty situation in Nicaragua is the same as it was 55 years ago. He questioned what was being done to improve the lives of farm laborers. He said people need to come together to work at all levels in order to help everyone earn more income and move people out of poverty.
2. Another person mentioned global warming and how this needed to be considered. Ronald responded to this, and recommended people take a percentage of their farm land for planting trees to increase forest, which should also be looked at as income.

Ronald and Jessie explained to some of the hosts (e.g. San Francisco Cooperative) what my role was in evaluating FTF. This highlighted the importance of having an on-going discussion about the different functions and benefits of evaluation with host organizations as it turned out I was viewed by many as the “auditor”. It should also be reiterated to hosts that the purpose of this M&E system is to measure the effectiveness of the FTF program and not their organizations or enterprises.

We then sampled many different cheeses and yogurt before our long journey back to Managua. We discussed more about FTF and the dairy sector during the drive back.

We returned to hotel at around 5:30pm to email and work on the trip report.

Thursday, 3/18/2010

We worked in the office all day: Kerry, Jessie, Daniel, Ronald and Agnes.

Inventory of data collection tools

We began with a flip chart exercise taking inventory of all the existing data collection tools that are used by FTF staff in Nicaragua. We discussed what information they provide, who requires it, and how it is used. We also identified gaps and missing information in each of the tools.

We then used the projector to develop a data collection plan, starting with the intended outcomes of the project. We discussed the indicators that they would use to answer the questions related to increasing milk production and quality. Ronald and Daniel added a few new indicators such as “Number of collection sites where milk shows at least 5 hours of blue on the Reductasa Test”. This information will be measured using the dairy annex, but it may need to be modified to ask more specific questions related to these indicators. Most of the information will be collected by Daniel as part of his role as field officer. We also agreed on when the data will be collected. It might be useful for Daniel to keep a separate schedule with a check list of what information needs to be collected and when it needs to be done. I can provide support in putting this together.

Volunteer reports

We reviewed some volunteer reports and asked the country staff how they used them. There were a number of issues with previously written reports and cover sheets listing recommendation by host. For example, most volunteers did not list the specific host that they assisted. Often times they wrote the area they visited, or the general cooperative/association or company without listing the names of farmers that participated. Also, we found that a few volunteers had listed hosts that were not actually hosts; they had just done field visits to these cooperatives but it was never decided that they would be hosts. It is important that volunteers understand what hosts are, and

which hosts they will be working with, to ensure consistency in documenting recommendations by host in their reports. Daniel agreed to inform all volunteers of the exact names of hosts as they are listed in F2Fnet, and that they understand which hosts they are working with throughout their assignments. Ronald stated that many of the recommendations listed in volunteer reports were too broad, and not specific to the individual hosts. I suggested that keeping some sort of "log" listing the specific hosts and recommendations made throughout the visit might be useful to volunteers.

We then took some of the volunteer activities from the reports and discussed how these fit into the various project logic models. This helped illustrate the link between activities, recommendations and intended outcomes.

Friday, 3/19/2010

Jessie and I were picked up at the hotel at 5:30am to travel to Rivas to visit the Lacteos Nicaragua Cooperative (host), the milk processing plant and horticulture site with Daniel and Agnes.

We first visited host Alberto Ordonez, an individual private farmer who is a member of Lacteos Nicaragua Rivas Cooperative. He expressed his gratitude for FTF support, and said that before FTF, no one ever bothered to visit his farm. He explained the changes he has made in the type of silage he is using, increasing feedings to twice a day, as well as changes in grazing. He is hoping this will produce more milk in a shorter period of time.

We then met with the heads of the Lacteos Nicaragua Cooperative at the milk processing plant. They articulated their goal of increasing milk and dairy products and improving marketing. They work with 100 farmers, 35% of which are women. Twelve of their 20 employees at the plant are also women, as well as the manager. They explained that most female farmers only have 1-2 cows, producing only 4-5 liters at a time, and that most cooperatives don't want to buy from them because of this.

They produce both pasteurized cheese for tourists as well as traditional cheese, which is preferred by local people. They talked about key areas of FTF support including: improved sanitation practices; cow health; production and feeding practices. They said their current focus is to work with farmers who have fewer cows that produce more milk (rather than many cows that don't produce much). This was a recommendation from a FTF volunteer. Josh Peissig, FTF volunteer, recommended they open up the roof that had been covering the compressor. They believe this has helped extend the life of the compressor as it keeps the engine cool. Also, as FTF volunteer Bob Albrecht recommended, they now test milk cans every week and use bleach to disinfect them. They keep records of all of their milk testing. It was agreed that Daniel would use these records when filling out the dairy annex for this host. Apparently the Ministry of Health conducts a monitoring visit 1-2 times per month. Internships are offered from the International School of Agriculture and Dairy Livestock Vet Science and Ag majors. They also offer internships to Food Technology majors from León University.

We then had lunch with the two heads of the cooperative and stopped by the beach at Lake Nicaragua to take pictures of the volcano. We did some shopping at the market on the way back to Managua. After reaching Managua, we met up with Ronald for a quick recap of our field visit and final farewell. After dinner, I collected my bags from Don Quijote hotel and moved to the Best Western Executive hotel across from the airport.

Saturday, 3/20/2010

Returned to Madison.

KEY ISSUES:

Follow-up and Documentation

There was some discussion around who is responsible for following up on volunteer assignments after the volunteer leaves the country, particularly for hosts who only receive assistance from one or two volunteers. How frequently should follow up take place?

Daniel said that seeking feedback from hosts about volunteer assignments was a regular part of his weekly activities. He normally documents these visits in a field report which he gives to Ronald, but had no systematic way of storing, analyzing or sharing this information. We discussed journaling as a way to capture key information that is useful in program management, monitoring progress and in evaluating the overall effectiveness of program. Daniel agreed that would be a good habit to start, and would be useful when writing bi-annual reports for POA, as well as in his regular communication with Ronald.

Another method suggested is to document field/follow up visits using a standard form. These could be kept in a file folder for regular review, which could aid program decision making, improvement and accountability. It would also give hosts an opportunity to express their satisfaction/dissatisfaction with FTF technical assistance, their future needs for FTF support, and any difference they have noticed as a result of any new practices or changes made, as recommended by FTF volunteers. Daniel felt that using a form would be very useful to him. It was agreed that aiming for one follow up form per month for each host was a realistic goal.

Ronald said that it was also the cooperatives and associations responsibility for following up with their farmers on volunteer recommendations. However, they do not regularly report this information to FTF.

Volunteers could also play a role in following up on previous volunteer recommendations. Including this in their scope of work would be useful (I noticed in a few volunteer reports that this has been done in the past).

Flex assignments

One aim of this of this trip was to help establish an M&E plan for the country project which focuses on the dairy sector. However, a number of volunteer assignments fall out of this sector under what is called "Flexible" assignments. As these assignments are not part of the dairy sector project strategy, there will need to be a way to measure the effectiveness of this work. This is a topic for future discussion with POA.

Logic models

We discussed how the project logic models should be viewed as and iterative process. It should be flexible to change as the program progresses, the dairy sub-sector develops and needs change (as expected). Volunteer activities will likely fit into the logic model as they take place (not always pre-planned or exactly known at the beginning of the program).

When we revisited the logic models, Ronald asked how they would measure if best practices were disseminated. We discussed how the university annex might help capture that information- particularly the questions about demonstrations sites, research to practice, and outreach. He also came up with more specific outcomes and indicators to measure best practice. These have been added to the revised project logic models and included in the data collection plan.

University Annex

A copy was given to the head of the UNA Managua to fill out. Ronald reiterated the concern that the baseline survey form does not collect information relevant to the universities. It was agreed that this does need to be filled out for all hosts, as it is a USAID requirement, but that more of the specific intended outcomes for universities role in strengthening the dairy sub sector would be measured by the annex.

Baseline survey forms

After reviewing the baseline form again, it was noted that number 8 asks for the **number** of people with environmental threats, but not **what** these environmental threats are. It will make it difficult to measure improvements or changes associated with specific recommendations about environmental threats. I suggest adding a question about what the specific threats are and, on the impact survey form, what measures were taken to remove the threat.

CAPACITY BUILDING NEEDS:

Daniel expressed an interest in learning more about data collection methods and analysis. The country staff in general might benefit from a workshop on logic models- specifically, linking activities to intended outcomes. We covered this briefly, mainly discussing the 'if, then' and continuously asking the question: "Y que?"= So what? Daniel has made a number of observations that are important for program implementation and decision making, but has not documented these systematically. During the inventory of data collection tools exercise, the team seemed to get stuck on the question of "how is this information analyzed?". Daniel specifically expressed an interest in learning ways to analyze the data he collects from the field.

FUTURE VOLUNTEER NEEDS:

Ronald articulated the need for capacity building of cooperatives, associations and companies in monitoring and evaluation. He stated that *tecnicos* play an important role in monitoring and following up with hosts on recommendations, and that this was their responsibility as much as Daniel's. He and Daniel both felt it would be useful to recruit volunteers to work with these hosts on logic models (specifically, understanding how FTF volunteer work and recommendations lead to intended outcomes/impact). This would also support the sustainability of the FTF program overall.

INFORMATION FOR EVALUATION STUDIES:

Daniel explained that he and Ronald are both technicians on top of their FTF role, and that they regularly provide support to all of the hosts. This is ongoing. He said that he also attends all of the workshops and hands-on support provided by all volunteers, as he normally has to translate anyway. He doesn't know if he and Ronald are included in the number of people trained/assisted in volunteer reports, and Jessie was also unsure. This should be clarified. It is important to recognize the on-going support and follow-up that

the country staff provides host. This should also be considered when measuring outcomes/impacts associated with FTF.

Other information that could be useful for evaluation studies:

- Follow up and feedback reports from field officer visits
- Post then pre retrospective evaluations of workshops/presentations/trainings conducted by FTF volunteers
- Information about flex assignments and hosts (e.g. Casa de las Mujeres)
- Information from farm laborers (increased knowledge and skills, increased income, etc.) to measure impacts of FTF on this population (not considered hosts)
- Other information that could help measure change, intended or unintended (e.g. hygiene and sanitation practices; impacts of increased production on families/children; nutritional status; knowledge of benefits of dairy; etc.)

OTHER OBSERVATIONS:

M&E “tools”

The country teams are extremely busy and have little time for “extra work”. It is important that they understand the relevance of data collection in relation to the overall project objectives to ensure good quality data is collected. The monitoring/follow-up form that has been suggested for use by Daniel on his field visits could help document concerns/observations/changes related to FTF. However, it should avoid collecting any “extra” or unnecessary information that will not be used for monitoring and evaluation or programming purposes.

Farm laborers not receiving FTF assistance

We also addressed an issue of farm laborers not receiving FTF assistance even though they are most likely the ones putting the recommendations made by volunteers into practice. We therefore added an assumption in the logic model which states that the farmer groups are transferring knowledge to the laborers, who will then put the learning into practice on the farm. However, this does not address the impacts of increased production on the lives of farm laborers and their families/children. A general observation made in the field report from Larry Jones and Arlen Albrecht (October 4-10, 2009) was that volunteers will teach their content matter to three distinct groups as appropriate, which includes farm laborers. It is also noted that the distinct groups will have different learning levels/styles and therefore require different methods of transferring information. Having this information prior to the visit would help volunteers plan their sessions and activities to best meet the needs of their audience. This might also require evaluation tools to be adapted for non-literate populations.

NEXT STEPS:

- Ronald will review data collection plan and make comments for revision
- Daniel will enter all of the baseline data for each of the 34 (29 dairy project, 5 flex) hosts into F2Fnet (annex information pending F2Fnet)
- Kerry will develop a draft field visit/monitoring form for Daniel to use as a guide when following up with hosts in the field; to be used for reporting, monitoring and evaluation; Daniel will field test the form and email Kerry suggestions/revisions

- Kerry will draft a generic post-then-pre retrospective evaluation form to include in volunteer packets for evaluating their work (workshops/trainings/seminars/etc) and send around for comment
- Ronald and Daniel to work with Jessie on plan for providing more technical assistance directly to farm laborers, as well as farm owners
- If agreed, Kerry will develop a log for volunteers to document host names by date, activity and recommendations as they move through their assignment- the idea is that this will not need to be turned in as a requirement, but may be useful in keeping track of specific hosts, by name, and the recommendations made (I myself found this difficult to keep track of when I was writing up this report)
- Kerry is in the process of compiling recommendations for volunteer orientation packet and trip report guidelines. This will be submitted after other field visits are carried out in order to consider all countries and contexts
- Daniel and Ronald will provide feedback on the university annex

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Modify the dairy annex to include specific information about milk quality and testing at the collection and processing sites. Specifically, add a question regarding **number of hours milk stays blue on a Reductasa Test**. Consider adding other questions (particular to numbers 18 and 20) that will gather more information about practices that affect milk quality, such as: hygiene and sanitation practices observed; time period between collection, processing and distribution; cleanliness of containers; storage temperature; etc.
2. Ensure volunteer assignments, particularly in area of technology transfer, includes direct support to farm laborers as they are the ones who will need to modify practices and adopt many of the recommendations to improve milk quality and increase production.
3. Include names of hosts (as they are listed in F2Fnet) in the volunteer scope of work prior to their visit so that they have an understanding of which hosts they will be working with. Including brief profile information would also be helpful.
4. Country staff should make sure to tell volunteers which specific hosts they will be working with on any given day of their assignment, and be clear about any changes to the itinerary.
5. Discuss with cooperatives and associations the possibility of recruiting FTF volunteers to build the M&E capacity of the *technicos* responsible for following up with farmers on FTF recommendations.

ATTACHED AS ANNEXES:

1. Revised list of hosts
2. Revised host relational map and logic models
3. Inventory of data collection tools (results from exercise)
4. Draft data collection plan

END.