

Village Update

Norwich, Nicaragua



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This quarter the Agros Nicaragua staff honors the exemplary model of Maria Magdalena Perez, an energetic woman whose encouragement continues to motivate her neighbors in continuing to make steps forward. At 55 years, Maria is mother of 7 children, Vice President of Norwich's Committee and an active participant in the sheep and cow project. Sharing her bright smile with all around her, Norwich is blessed by Maria's involvement in the Heifer International Project, through which she has gained 60 hens, and her commitment to community organization and youth. Her success with Heifer, through several trainings offered to Norwich and interactions with her own children have been noted by other members of the community and continue to be a source of encouragement to many.

Community Organization

The leadership of Norwich is actively participating in the execution of community activities, promoting full participation from every family and encouraging the strengthening of the community's religious and ethical values.

Many of Norwich's families have been deeply committed to the community's organizational progress, as seen through the

trainings that are being attended by the various organized groups of men, women and children.

Together with the leadership team, the families are working together to improve the quality of life within their community. For example, the village organizes and conducts community wide clean-up days to maintain the condition of the roads surrounding their land. Many individuals take on additional responsibilities to ensure a project well done, such as Karla Tellez, who has recently been delegated to be in charge of guaranteeing the completion of the sewing projects in Norwich. During this training process organized groups of men, women and children have met to discuss various topics.

Housing and Infrastructure

During this quarter, the families of Norwich continue to work together with the Agros staff to install irrigation systems on the land. With irrigation capabilities, the families have the capacity to diversify their crops, expanding to the production of passion fruit, papaya and the most recent crop, plantains.

Sustainable Economic Growth

The families have begun the development process of incorporating microfinance into their community's economy. Two families in the middle of their first planting have taken loans for fertilizer and are already experiencing positive results and are making timely repayments.

With the region's limiting climate and poor soil quality, as well as some of the families' willingness to participate, it is difficult to ensure that every family will generate their own income through production. However, trainings in cattle-raising have greatly contributed to an improved awareness of livestock management among the participating families, and are helping to improve the production of the families.

The development of administrative trainings for three women organizing the sheep project permitted the selling of fifty-eight sheep. The income from this sale was used to pay for the project's loan, directing \$1,458 towards the principal and \$130 for interest.

The three families participating in the cattle project saw great blessing in the birth of five calves. These positive results have increased the sense of motivation for the participants to maintain their commitment to the project. This project also is contributing to a more balanced diet for the community.

Fifteen families have joined in the plantain project to cultivate 10.3 acres of plantains after witnessing the success from the original two families who began the project. Of these two families, one was able to pay US\$ 30 towards their loan and

interest. Technical assistance and provision of supplies for fertilizer continues to be available for this group in order to ensure improved development and yield of the crop.

Diversification of crops is gaining ground in the community as five families begin to experiment with the cultivation of papaya. The sale of this product is expected to generate income in the short run and thus cover the families' food expenses.

Seven families planted 10.3 acres of sorghum with the intent of guaranteeing food security for the community.

During the present agricultural cycle, seven families have completed their first harvest of corn. This crop will be used in the making of tortillas and tamales and will contribute to the families' diet during the dry season months.

Currently, seventeen families are cultivating plantains as part of their on-going project they have named, "*La Esperanza Verde*" (The Green Hope). They continue to take part in trainings and receive technical assistance to improve their agricultural techniques. The households participating in this effort have faith that they will experience success with the production and marketing of this crop, apparent in the care and concern they show in the upkeep of their fields.

Two families have volunteered to take part in an experimental growing phase of fruit trees and are eagerly awaiting the results of this newest agricultural development.

Community Education and Training

In the area of community education and training, children, youth and parents have participated in various trainings with themes in Tenderness, The Family and the Community and Human Rights. These particular issues are emphasized with the objective of strengthening social relationships among the community members. The leadership also extends tools useful to the cultivation of a spirit of volunteerism and service within the individuals of the community.

The health program is currently benefiting from the families coming together to organize themselves and increase their awareness of the importance of hygiene and nutrition. Little by little, members of the community are incorporating new habits that promote good hygiene and teaching them to their children.

Although the women of the community generally are very active, Norwich is looking to increase a more integral participation of women, men and children as they discuss community issues such as Value Development.

Eighteen families have committed themselves to the practice of Environmental Health through organized conferences about cleanliness in their household and the surrounding land. In the educational program, the director of the school together with the leadership of the community, technical and social committees are coordinating trainings about Educating with Tenderness and Gender and the Family. These discussions are directed towards the parents to share with their children.

Bible studies and discussions were held with twenty-one families participating in this reflection of the family in the light of biblical messages and strengthening of the spirituality of each participating individual. One of the goals of these gatherings was to organize weekly Bible studies.

A new community committee has formed with seven men and women meeting together over the common interest of promoting gender equality and the development of local leadership. The members of this group have demonstrated a tremendous will to work as an organized group. The committee hopes to encourage families of the village to participate in communal tasks and youth to participate in activities that develop their manual abilities as a part of the community's Human Development plan.

A group of ten children and adolescents progress in their instructional course about manual abilities. With this educational effort and several others, the families of Norwich are demonstrating positive change in the social and educational aspects of their community and expressing a genuine appreciation and value for a new beginning with land ownership and education.