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This issue presents:



Nicaragua in Crisis:
Agros steadfastly
supports families



Hot Peppers!
How peppers mean
profit for farmers



Early Childhood Education:
Creating opportunity
for a lifetime!

Empowered One Egg at a Time: Juana Gaspar

Agros partner Juana Gaspar grew up in a poor household—her home had a palm leaf roof, a dirt floor, and a fire for cooking. No one in her family wore shoes—not even her father who made his living with a machete. It was a rough start, but Juana is not letting that slow her down.

Now, Juana lives in the Agros village of La Providencia, Guatemala. Her family farms several acres of cardamom and coffee. With farming income, she and her husband have sent all 10 of their children to school. Two of Juana's kids are nurses, one is a teacher, and one will be an agricultural engineer.

Juana's home today is very different from that of her childhood. She has a metal roof, a cement floor, an enclosed eco-stove, a flushing toilet, and running water. This infrastructure was provided in part by Agros and its supporters, but

Juana and her family provided the hard labor that made it possible.

And, Juana is not done yet. Her primary goal is to pay off her family's land debt. She is so focused on her goal that she is taking on extra work to achieve it. In addition to taking care of her family, Juana raises pigs and chickens. She says, "Agros taught us how to take care of the chickens. How to give vaccinations, vitamins, and antibiotics. We know a lot because of Agros." She likes to keep the chickens close to the house, so she can tend her kids, grandkids, and hens all at once.

Thanks to the work you support, Juana has made a huge difference in the lives of her children, and she feels empowered to continue growing. She is such a shrewd and strong leader in her family, it seems certain that it will not be long before she has her land paid off!



Nicaragua in Turmoil

Agros steadfastly supports families

Nicaragua erupted in civil protests in April 2018 when the government tried to raise taxes and cut retirement. The measure was quickly withdrawn, but protests broadened into demands for President Daniel Ortega to resign. The government responded harshly to the protests—over 300 people were killed and 50,000 fled the country.

The instability has had massive economic implications for what was already the second poorest country in the Western hemisphere. According to World Bank figures, 350,000 jobs were lost and the economy contracted four percent. Before the crisis, the economy was considered relatively stable. Now, however, the costs of food and imported goods like fuel and medicine are rising.

As this was written in early 2019, the Nicaraguan government approved a new plan to increase taxes and cut retirement benefits. Experts do not expect massive protests again; however, they do expect the recession to continue.

What does this mean for Agros families? Agros villages are far from the primary conflict, but still face its repercussions. At times it is unsafe to leave the villages, and it is difficult to access healthcare, markets, and other services. Additionally, prices for farm goods, and thus incomes, have dropped.

Despite the turmoil, Agros is committed to the families we serve. While our strategies may change, the goal is the same: to help farming families break the cycle of poverty in rural Latin America. To meet the current needs of families in Nicaragua, we implemented a three-pronged approach.

First, we are continuing as many of our programs as possible. Planned projects—like an upgraded coffee mill in Tierra Nueva, Nicaragua—have recently been completed. Additionally, all families who previously had access to credit for farming will continue to have access. We can even say

that while many non-Agros farms have reduced production, Agros communities have maintained and diversified theirs.

Second, we have increased our focus on food security. We have built up a reserve of basic grains that will serve as a food bank, if needed. Moreover, we are helping Agros families increase their individual food security through backyard gardens and the opportunity to raise and sell animals in their own communities.

AGROS HEALTH FAIRS GIVE FAMILIES ACCESS TO VACCINES, ULTRASOUNDS, BLOODWORK, PRESCRIPTIONS, AND OTHER MEDICAL SERVICES.



Finally, we are hosting health fairs for Agros families—and their neighbors. These fairs give families access to prescriptions, ultrasounds, bloodwork, and other medical services not otherwise available.

Our Nicaragua staff has done a tremendous job working in poor conditions, and Agros families have shown great courage as they face continued insecurity. We are also grateful for continued solidarity from supporters like you. These relationships give us confidence in saying that whatever happens next in Nicaragua, we will be there.



Hot peppers!

How peppers mean profit for farmers

Just a few years ago, Agros farmers in San Jose, Nicaragua, would grow small gardens with a mix of vegetables. They had to buy seedlings to grow specialty crops like peppers, and trying both to grow the vegetables and market them was more than a single farmer could handle. Thus, farmers were stuck selling produce to a middleman for low prices.

Seeing these frustrated farmers inspired our agronomists to find ways to improve profits for farmers. For example, we have helped farmers in San Jose specialize in peppers (eight varieties!) to which we have also helped them add value.

First, Agros farmers and techs work together to sprout pepper plants in greenhouses. Before, farmers bought seedlings that were often diseased from other providers.

After about 15 days, the Agros-grown seedlings are replanted. In three months, they grow to full maturity and begin producing peppers. Without Agros’ help, farmers usually grew plants that produced for only 90 days. Now, Agros farmers are growing plants that produce for up to 180 days—and those harvests are coming more frequently. Overall, Agros farmers have moved from having about two harvests a year to having up to five.



After harvesting, Agros farmers used to sell their peppers to middlemen at low prices. They were not guaranteed a market, and sometimes they had produce they could not sell at all. Now, Agros has negotiated “forward purchase contracts” with major grocery store chains like La Unión and La Colonia, the largest grocery stores in Nicaragua. Forward purchase contracts mean that our farmers are

recognized and respected as professionals, and they know how many peppers they can sell at what price—before they even plant them.



The middlemen also used to transport crops to market. Agros now has our own refrigerated truck. This means that after Agros farmers harvest their peppers, they combine them into a large truckload and deliver them to market all at once. When farmers control more of the peppers’ movement from field to store, they earn more overall.

These changes translate to profit and opportunity for pepper farmers. Take Norlan, for example. When he started growing peppers with Agros, he went from earning \$2,000 a year to earning \$4,000 for a single pepper harvest. That’s a big win as we work to build profits for farmers!

Vision Trips!

Travel with Agros and see hope in action

Meet the farming families Agros serves. Experience life in rural Latin America. Learn how we are breaking the cycle of poverty. Be inspired to help make it all happen! Opportunities to travel with Agros this year include:

- **Guatemala:** June 23 - 29
- **Honduras:** November 3 - 9

For more information, contact Guillermo Jiménez at 206.686.3544 or guillermoj@agros.org.

Early Childhood Education

Creating opportunity for a lifetime!

Since Agros was founded in 1984, education has been a critical piece of our health & well-being programs. By ensuring Agros villages have access to well-built, well-staffed elementary schools, we give children an opportunity their parents never had: the chance to complete six years of school in countries where the average person might only complete 4.5 years of school. Ninety-five percent of the kids in Agros villages attend school regularly.

Access is the foundation of our education work, but a few years ago we wanted to do more. After some research, we realized that we could most efficiently impact the children of the rural farming families we serve by instituting early childhood education. By contrast, a focus on secondary education would have reached less than half of high school age kids. We are thrilled to say that our early childhood education program is nearing full implementation.

In 2014, *Science Magazine* published strong new evidence that suggests early childhood education will help children in developing countries overcome barriers to success. The long-term study looked at a hundred toddlers who received weekly visits from community health workers over a two-year period. Each visit included a play session designed to develop cognitive, language, and psychosocial skills. The health workers also taught the adults parenting skills.

As the toddlers grew, they were compared to a control group that did not receive stimulation. The children in the stimulation group improved their reading abilities, were 50 percent less likely to drop out, and attended more years of school overall. Twenty years later, the stimulation group earned about 25 percent more than the control group.

This winter Agros certified nine people—four Agros staff members and five community members—to teach Agros parents positive parenting skills as well as games and activities to help their children fully develop. In essence, they are the “community health workers” of the study described above. These trained individuals will accompany 25 families in La Bendición, Nicaragua, with children from zero to five years old. We have also developed parenting manuals on 13 topics like stimulating creativity and developing the mind that will also be shared.

Soon we hope to also accompany families in Tierra Nueva, Nicaragua, with this program. While the program is still in its infancy (pun intended!), we look forward to seeing long-term outcomes in the years ahead!



Thank you Community Partners!

Your support at the 2018 Tierras de Vida gala delivers hope and opportunity to farming families in rural Latin America.

HARVEST!



GROW!



PLANT!

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