

EPIC – 2005 ANNUAL REPORT

2005 was a year of ferocious hurricanes! These brought Epic into hurricane response work as we supported the relief and reconstruction efforts of 6 local organizations. It also provided a chance to evaluate the soil and water management practices being taught by our sustainable agriculture programs. They held up under extreme conditions and prevented erosion on hillside farms!

2005 was also a year of important expansion and innovation for programs that EPIC has been working with for several years. For example, the **FUNDAMARCOS Sustainable Development Program in Guatemala** started a health and nutrition education component that compliments the program's very successful agricultural work. Now that families have increased food availability and more income, they now have a chance to make choices that will improve family health and quality of life.



Planting a garden in front of the local health center is an innovation not seen in Guatemala. Matea Calo, a new health worker with FUNDAMARCOS, teaches Achi Maya women to plant herbs for traditional medicines and nutritious vegetables outside the doors of their own homes.

2005 saw serious conversations between the Honduran government and two EPIC supported training centers with the objective of having them become official vehicles of national agricultural extension and leaders for the promotion, certification, and marketing of organic foods. This would enable training methods and sustainable agriculture practices developed by these agricultural centers to receive country wide multiplication.

EPIC's 2005 Annual Report will be organized around these highlights.

FUNDAMARCOS Sustainable Development Program in Guatemala

When FUNDAMARCOS begins agricultural work in a village, baseline information is gathered from farmers who have been using conventional farming practices, including chemical fertilizer and herbicide. Yields are weighed and comparisons made after new production practices are implemented. Corn and bean production generally doubles in the first year and triples by the second or third year. This is particularly significant because corn and beans are the staples of the rural Guatemalan diet. When families have increased food availability and more income, they have more freedom and an opportunity to make choices that will improve family health and quality of life.

In February of 2005, FUNDAMARCOS began a primary health care program to complement the program's very successful agricultural work. Much effort this year has involved giving health and nutrition training to new health promoters and existing agricultural leaders. Health education is being integrated with the existing extensive work in agriculture. Matea Calo and Ceferino Gonzales have been hired as health promoters. They have organized women and are now working with groups from 5 villages.



Achi Maya women, including traditional midwives, attend a FUNDAMARCOS health promoter training class.



Matea Calo teaches a class to a group of women from the village of El Rodeo, Baja Verapaz.

Expansion of Agricultural Education

The program started in 1998 with 44 farmers in 6 villages of the Municipio of Pachalum, El Quiché. It grew to impact 310 farmers in 2004, and this year FUNDAMARCOS worked with 415 families. To date it has worked in 33 villages, in 4 municipios within 3 departments (states) of Guatemala. As the work expanded, program director Felipe Tomás, divided the communities into 3 groups. The first consists

of new villages receiving initial contact and instruction. The second group of villages is the one receiving major program emphasis. The third group consists of villages that had been emphasized in the past and now is receiving only an occasional follow-up visit for encouragement or specific trouble shooting relating to problems that may have arisen. This progression allows the program to gradually leave areas of early work and move on to assist new villages each year.

FUNDAMARCOS has now provided 1,854 "participant years" of agricultural training in Guatemala. Since farmers frequently stay in the program for more than one year, the number of individual farmers who have participated would be less than half that number. However, farm families are large, averaging about 7 persons - including children, and perhaps elderly parents and disabled or unmarried siblings. Thus, the total number of persons that have been impacted by greatly increased crop yields and improved farm income is 5,000 to 5,600 people.



The ear on the left was produced using the conventional farming practices in the Baja Verapaz area. In the adjoining field, new sustainable organic agricultural practices produced the ear on the right. Obviously, farmers are delighted with what this means for their farm income!

Rains from Hurricane Stan

The dramatic increase in production seen in the first year of using the agricultural practices taught by FUNDAMARCOS is often specifically related to water management practices that retain rainwater and increase the water-holding capacity of the soil. This has been very important in years of drought or erratic rainfall.

From October 6 to 8, 2005, Hurricane Stan slowly traveled across El Salvador and Guatemala causing massive erosion and landslides, and killing more people than Hurricane Katrina. In spite of days of soaking rains, FUNDAMARCOS program director Felipe Tomás reported to EPIC that there was not destruction in the program area where fields were protected with practices of soil and water management. The contour ditches held and filled with water. The living grass barriers captured huge amounts of topsoil, and the rock retaining walls also held back soil, causing the terraces to grow. The soil and water management practices had been as effective with torrential rains as when there was too little rain.

La Semilla del Progreso Training Center in Honduras

Youth Groups—Vocational Education in Agriculture

In 2005 *La Semilla* Training Center worked with youth in four villages. The teens have responded with great enthusiasm, embracing the idea of having their own agricultural projects. The hours of labor they put in have brought forth great harvests. Success is also due to the fact that parents, and often siblings, are involved from start to finish. In order to participate in the program, youth do not leave their rural communities for more than the two 5-day courses at the training center.

Honduras has rates of unemployment and underemployment estimated at 30%, the highest in all of Central America. Honduras also has Central America's fastest rural to urban migration, which continues even though there are not city jobs for youth migrating to the cities. Feeling there are no options, many go "North". Some of these youth get captured and return worse off, and others die. These who succeed may endure illegal migrant working conditions never imagined. Parents



This *zanja productiva* (productive ditch) grows bananas while protecting field from excessive rainfall. It was made by the youth in the white bill cap.



Many señoritas in the youth groups are proud of their gardens.

who had experienced the benefits of the sustainable farming practices taught by *La Semilla del Progreso* asked, “Isn’t there something you can do for our teenage children? We are afraid of losing them”. In 2001 *La Semilla* began a program of Vocational Agricultural Training for groups of rural youth 14 to 22 years of age. This year *La Semilla* used the following program for youth groups in their first year of agricultural education.

First Year Training for Youth Groups

1. Organization and local orientation in the village for the new group of 20 to 25 youth and their parents
2. First 5-day residential course at *La Semilla* Training Center
3. Youth start their own agricultural projects with supervision by the local junior leader
4. About 6 weeks after the first course, Laureano Jacobo visits the project of each student to monitor progress, give encouragement, and provide advice.
5. Second 5-day residential course at *La Semilla* Training Center
6. Continued local supervision of projects by the local junior leader
7. Visit by *La Semilla* staff to each student’s project
8. End of the year evaluation involving the whole youth group and the *La Semilla* staff

In 2001 when the youth program began, *La Semilla del Progreso* provided this entire year-long vocational training program at a cost of \$141.30 per person. The cost of giving the same training program in 2005 was \$156 per youth for a complete year. This is considered very cost effective vocational training! The second year of instruction takes place in the group’s home village and is significantly less expensive per student.

Farmer Training Expands Into New Areas

In October 1998, Hurricane Mitch devastated entire regions of Honduras, Nicaragua and Guatemala. Hillside erosion, landslides, and severe flooding caused massive devastation across Honduras. After Mitch, EPIC greatly increased its work with farmers in Central America to help mitigate the impact of the increasingly severe weather events they were experiencing - hurricanes, deluges of rain, and droughts.

Hurricane Beta hit Honduras on October 30, 2005, followed by Tropical Storm Gamma, Nov. 19. After receiving 5 days of heavy rain, Laureano Jacobo, Director of *La Semilla del Progreso* Training Center, evaluated what had happened in the areas where farmers had implemented the soil and water management practices that he had been teaching since Hurricane Mitch in 1998. He said farmer participants in the EPIC supported training program were reporting that their fields suffered none of the erosion they had experienced after Hurricane Mitch. Instead of causing sheet erosion, the heavy and constant rains had filled the deep *zanjas productivas* (productive ditches - photo page 3) with water that would gradually seep into their fields .

La Semilla del Progreso has a program, similar to the youth training schedule, specifically designed for adult farmer/leaders. Since 2000, 626 farmers (men and women) have completed two to four 4-day courses at the *La Semilla* Training Center. In this part of rural Honduras farm families are also large, averaging about 7 persons supported per farm. Using this number, approximately 4,382 family members have been impacted by the agricultural practices taught by the EPIC portion of this program.

Country Wide Multiplication

La Semilla del Progreso, with its farmer-to-farmer multiplication strategy, is providing a model for teaching environmentally sustainable agriculture for the country of Honduras. In 2005 the Ministry of Agriculture and the Division of Natural Resources of the Government of Honduras presented a bill to the National Congress making the twelve agricultural *Centros de Enseñanza y Aprendizaje* (Center for Teaching and Learning or CEA) the official vehicles of national agricultural extension and leaders for the promotion, certification, and marketing of organic foods. Two of the twelve Honduran CEA centers, *Loma Linda* and *La Semilla del Progreso*, are EPIC projects. *Loma Linda* was the first of these Honduran agricultural training centers dedicated to increasing the knowledge and abilities of the *campesino* (poor farmer). EPIC and the *Loma Linda* Training Center have worked together since the 1980's.

Laureano Jacobo, the director of *La Semilla del Progreso*, serves as secretary of the national coordinating commission for the *Centros de Enseñanza y Aprendizaje*. He was chosen to be spokesperson for an important national meeting of CEAs with the Honduran government in September of 2005. We are pleased with this opportunity for EPIC's agricultural programs to have impact countrywide.

Loma Linda Training Center

José Elías Sanchez is recognized in Central America as instigator of the idea of farmer run agricultural training centers. Elías created the Loma Linda Training Center (the first CEA) on land he obtained from the Honduran government. Here Elías gave courses to about 40,000 people between 1972 and Hurricane Mitch in 1998. Elías was a most talented teacher and an effective proponent of sustainable agriculture, soil and water conservation, and living harmoniously with the environment.



At Loma Linda Training Center terraces built before Hurricane Mitch hit in late 1998 are still holding the soil and producing abundant crops in 2005.



To the great sadness of all who knew him, Elías died suddenly on March 18, 2002. In July 2000, a group of friends and former colleagues of Elías signed a document legally forming “*Amigos de Loma Linda*”. EPIC became one of the “*amigos*” with Paul McKay as chair. The goal was to establish Loma Linda as a legal non-profit educational training center so that it could continue Elías’ life long work of promoting sustainable agriculture, vocational training, soil and water conservation, and environmentally sound life styles. In late 2005, Loma Linda Training Center finally received secure land title from the Honduran *Instituto Nacional Agrario*. This is of immense significance for the continuation of Loma Linda as a national training center.

Disaster Relief and Reconstruction

EPIC believes that disaster relief and reconstruction work is done best by organizations that were working in and knew the local area before the disaster hit. With the hurricanes that hit in 2005, EPIC personnel contacted individuals and/or organizations they personally knew and had worked with in the past. For instance, the 4 partners with which EPIC is working in Guatemala have all been co-workers and friends for 10 to 40 years.

USA

Hurricane Katrina relief and reconstruction with **Mennonite Disaster Service**. MDS sends volunteers to do clean up and construction after disasters. Workers donate their time, labor and skills. EPIC paid logistical support for volunteers.

Guatemala

Robert Hinshaw in Tzununa and through **PRO-LAGO**, a Guatemalan non-profit committed to preserving Lake Atitlan and the environment surrounding the lake.

Maya Hands in Panabaj and Santiago

Maya Hands was working with a group of weavers in Panabaj before the village was mostly covered by a mudslide. They provided survivors with essentials like appropriate Maya clothing, cook stoves, and looms and thread to return to weaving and re-establish income.

Cajas Cuesta family living in San Marcos de la Laguna provided immediate relief and helped Doctors Without Borders get established in the village.

Mujeres en Acción was working with a group of women in micro-enterprize in a village of Tecpan where several homes along a stream were washed away. Mujeres en Acción has bought 5.7 acres to enable the families to rebuild further from the stream.

El Salvador

APRODEHNI Before Hurricane Stan, EPIC had worked with APRODEHNI in the extremely poor villages near estuaries where rivers from the mountains flow into the Pacific Ocean. Low coastal areas are always the hit hardest by hurricanes. APRODEHNI distributed relief supplies to families whose homes were flooded or destroyed.

About EPIC

Since 1977, EPIC has been involving US citizens and persons around the world in programs of education and action. EPIC provides training, logistical, and financial support to grassroots organizations demonstrating creative solutions to meeting serious problems facing humankind, specializing in the area of food production. From 1990 through 2004, EPIC participated in 179 projects in 21 countries of North and South America, Asia, and Africa. In 2005 EPIC worked in 24 projects in 9 countries.



APRODENI, Epic's partner in El Salvador, distributes mattresses to survivors of the winds and water of Hurricane Stan.