

Farm



Notes

November 2009

www.worldhungerrelief.org

info@worldhungerrelief.org

(254) 799-5611

Cultivating Partners in El Salvador

"This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how."

- Mark 4:26

"So what did you tell them?"

This question, posed by several friends following my recent trip to the mountain community of Valle Nuevo in El Salvador, left me perplexed.

"Actually, I didn't tell them anything. I mostly asked them questions!"

I often struggle to describe the non-directive approach WHRI utilizes to work with farming communities around the world. As professionals with high-tech resources, we're expected to bring answers. The leadership *Directiva* in Valle Nuevo seemed to have the same expectation. When I asked what they wanted their farms to look like 5-10 years from now, one member responded by saying he expected we had come to tell *them* the answer to that question!

I refused.

It's not that I'm stingy or ignorant. Even before setting foot on Salvadoran soil, I knew from photographs that soil conservation practices would help them farm more sustainably. Within the first few days

of our visit, I recognized that planting their corn closer together would likely produce higher yields per acre.

But I also knew that if my ideas became the focus of our visit, there would be little left behind when I headed home. The priorities for development need to be set by the communities they will serve, not by outsiders.



Valle Nuevo is searching for ways to keep their youth challenged and employed in their local community

They know their needs and resources far better than we do. The wisdom they've gained through generations of farming under difficult conditions is invaluable in developing solutions to today's problems. Our knowledge can serve as a resource, but only if it empowers local farmers to answer their own questions.

About an hour into our meeting with the *Directiva*, someone shared that they were worried about their youth. Many have studied and gone on to University, but when they finish there will be nothing for them to return to in Valle Nuevo.

"Growing corn on these steep *milpas* is hard work for little return. We want something better for our children."

... continued p. 2

... El Salvador

This comment catalyzed a change in the conversation. How could their farming enterprises create skilled employment for their youth? One member shared that she had visited a community where they dried and packaged tropical fruit. This would call for marketing skills and engineers, as well as farmers and skilled agronomists, to help grow high quality fruit. We talked about onions, tomatoes, and other vegetables that command a high price in local and regional markets, but which are currently brought ... in from San Salvador and Honduras. Slowly the mood shifted from fear to cautious optimism.



Bean harvest on the steep *milpa* of northern El Salvador

In the coming year we hope to develop a long-term partnership with the Valle Nuevo community. What form this will take is still uncertain, but regardless of whether they choose to work on vegetable production or soil conservation, our presence will serve to empower - not replace - their own resources. We will wait patiently as ideas and confidence build within the community. It's a lot like waiting to see the Kingdom germinate from a mustard seed.

Come to think of it, this *is* the Kingdom unfolding mysteriously before our eyes! How incredibly profound is this chaotic, unpredictable process? What an honor it is to be a part of it. How glad I am to *not* have all the answers.

Blessings,

Neil

P.S. For more information, visit the partner page of our website:
www.worldhungerrelief.org/international.html



Please Join Us for Dinner & a Program
Honoring & Celebrating

Frances Jean Ryther

On the Occasion of her 82nd Birthday

Monday, January 11th, 2010
7:00 PM

Hilton Waco Ballroom
113 South University Parks Drive

Limited Seating Available
\$82 per person

Please reserve your place by sending a check to:

P.O. Box 639
Elm Mott, TX 76640

Or contact Dale @ 254-799-5611
dale@worldhungerrelief.org



Working For Justice

I grew up in academia, as both my parents both have doctorates in music. The classic professors' kid, I focused on performing academically above just about anything else, besides bothering my little brother. We went to Mennonite church every Sunday, a loving and diverse community for me.

My Dad's job is not exactly 8 to 5, so he cooked our weekday meals: spaghetti with frozen peas, noodles and sausage with frozen peas, and fried rice (with frozen veggies mixed in) were our staple meals, winter or summer. When Mom was away, we would often eat mac & cheese from a box, or frozen burritos, or beans with chunks of hotdogs in them.

When I was in middle school, a new couple started coming to our church. They were starting a farm about a half-hour north of our house; not only did I love playing football with their son, but I started enjoying going out to their place and helping out with the weeds and eating really fresh food.

Through my time in high school, I volunteered at their farm and learned about what motivated them – good food that was also healthy for the earth. My parents purchased a share of their CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) garden each year.

I stayed focused on academics, and went to Carleton College, a secular liberal arts college in Northfield, Minnesota. I worked hard as a math major, but started finding meaning outside of class in Christian discussion groups and social justice networks. I started to think about the dynamics of race, gender, poverty, oppression, and privilege, and was blessed by people who connected those things to the food system.

I realized how much I love to work with my hands and body to make tangible change – living in my head is comfortable, but it is so much more meaningful to touch the world.

The summer after my junior year in college, I lived in a Catholic Worker house and went with a delegation with Christian Peacemaker Teams to the West Bank. My experiences with Christian community, as well as the injustice I saw in Palestine – where farmers lose access to land, have crops destroyed, sheep shot, and donkeys stabbed – caused me to re-evaluate how I lived out my faith.

By the time it came to decide what I wanted to do after college, I thought that working for justice with my hands in Christian community would be ideal. I heard of WHRI through relatives, and it sounded just about perfect.

Now I am one of the CSA interns at WHRI, and I will be here through next September. It is really exciting to get to learn the entire workings of a farm, from planning to harvest, instead of simply plugging myself in to do much-needed manual labor like I did when in high school.

I understand now how important weather is to farmers, and how valuable volunteer labor is. I plan to use the knowledge I gain from this setting back in the Upper Midwest on a farm, in an urban garden, or in another creative way where I can provide people better food choices than are conventionally available. Maybe someday I'll even convince Dad to use fresh peas instead of frozen when they're in season!

Wholeness & abundance,

Hannah Breckbill



Hannah Breckbill recently arrived, but has already been busy in the garden here on the Farm

WHRI Alumni & Intern Updates

◆ Peter & Ellie Bostwick Andres (2005)

Peter recently caught us up on their progress. "We are doing well. Ellie finished her Master of Public Health from George Washington and I'll be done with law school at GW in May. Ellie ... will be applying for the PhD program in Health Policy, and I'll be working for a law firm here in DC. Life is busy, but good."

◆ Samson Abukari (2009)

Samson has returned to Ghana and is with his family in the Tamale region. He is raising rabbits and working outside of town on a garden of tomatoes, cabbage, onions, carrots, radishes, and collards. He has visited Senegal, is helping with church planting in Ghana, and volunteering in community empowerment work. Samuel is also currently assisting *Creating Change*, a Canadian organization "assisting needy girls to attend school" and writes: "Because I have been in two cultures, (they believe) I can combine the two and help them."

◆ Kristen Box Pearson (2000)

Neil recently visited Kristen and Mark, a former WHRI Board member, in Austin, TX. They are involved in the leadership and development of Mosaic, an emerging urban church which includes several other WHRI alumni. Kristin works as counselor with Hope Alliance; Mark is with the Texas Water Development Board, addressing community water quality issues. They, along with 3-year old Naomi, are expecting their second child this winter!

◆ James Wilson (2003)

James recently returned to the Farm for a visit, showering us with his amazement at the growth he saw in our facilities and program. A graduate of Deep Springs College and the University of Virginia, James worked on a farm before striking out on his most recent adventure. He and his brothers are currently touring the nation with their band, "Sons of Bill."

World Hunger Relief, Inc. is a tax-exempt, non-profit corporation registered with the State of Texas under the 501(c)(3) IRS status.

Mission Statement

World Hunger Relief, Inc. is a Christian organization committed to the alleviation of hunger around the world.

God calls us to:

- **Train** individuals in holistic ministry that equips them to work with communities in developing sustainable farming techniques
- **Educate** those with an economic abundance on methods of conserving and sharing resources
- **Participate** in local and international sustainable development programs

Board of Directors

Victor Hinojosa, President
Fernando Arroyo, Secretary
Tom Odegaard, Treasurer
Annette Bigham
Mary Landon Darden

Sara Ingram
Linda Lewis
Lauren Redman
George Suhm
Norma Torres

Neil Rowe Miller, Executive Director
Matt Hess, Education Director
David Cole, Farm Manager
Dale Barron, Development Director
Barbara Murphy, Office Manager

Staff

neil@worldhungerrelief.org
matt@worldhungerrelief.org
david@worldhungerrelief.org
dale@worldhungerrelief.org
barbara@worldhungerrelief.org

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-Profit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Elm Mott, Texas
Permit No. 18

World Hunger Relief, Inc.
P.O. Box 639
Elm Mott, TX 76640-0639