



*Proceedings of the Sixth International Permaculture Conference
September-October 1996, Perth, Western Australia*

© Copyright Permaculture Association of Western Australia Inc. and authors.

The Nicaragua Project

Jerome Osentowski (USA)

[Presentation Report]

After years of Civil War, Nicaragua has been left with a legacy of dwindling rural resources and a lack of grassroots knowledge and finance at the village level. Nicaragua is still feeling the aftershocks of the war and internal feuding within the villages is still common.

Jerome Osentowski, Director of the Central Rocky Mountain Permaculture Institute (CRMPI), has been involved with a particular permaculture project in the small village of Teotecacinte which is within sight of the border with Honduras for the past five years. The demonstration farm Jerome, international volunteers and local villagers have now established in an integral part of the education process, source of education, seed supply and information for the local district and beyond.

The climate of the area is hot and humid most of the year and agricultural production is centred around cash crops for export rather than for feeding the population of approximately four million people, of which about forty percent still live in rural areas. Jerome, together with the sister city of Glenwood Springs in Colorado, first set up a garden at the local school in Teotecacinte. With the help of the children, manure, a resource which was plentiful and one that was not utilised, was brought to the donated land and the gardens were commenced.

The school children established the gardens with each class having their own plot which they established, seeded, weeded and finally harvested. The produce was often cooked in the school grounds. The aim of the course was to teach these youngsters self-sufficiency. These lessons they could not only take forward in life but also teach their parents and others around them on the way.

The second phase of the project, a demonstration farm, began in January 1995 and the goals achieved were green manures grown for seed production and trees.

Nicaraguan village kitchens burn wood and this is quickly becoming a scarce resource. The trees grown will supply fuel, fencing material, fodder, mulching material and have many other uses other than returning nitrogen to the soil after the trees are cut. The soils in the area are poor at best and need the addition of fertilisers

before anything can be grown but farmers have no credit to buy either fertilisers or chemicals/pesticides so the permaculture approach has been welcomed by the village.

Chickens and pigs in villages take precedence over vegetable gardens so living fences have been established for protection. The demonstration farm itself has generated a lot of interest and participation from locals, especially now they can see the benefits flourishing around the farm.

Other goals achieved were: designing a more fuel efficient stove for village kitchens. The locals were fully involved in the designing and the logistics involved with actually shaping and making the special bricks used.

The school-farm connection is another project which brought high school children to the farm for hands-on learning in sustainable agriculture.

Composting workshops were organised for the locals by CRMPI and Dutch volunteers. With all the domestic animals around villages, manure is in ready supply so it was a natural step to head towards composting. This has already caught on with some of the local farmers. Green manure crops is another goal for this year. The ultimate goal is to hand the demonstration farm over to the locals but presently CRMPI is looking for a full-time manager who is prepared to give a full one year to the project. Fluent Spanish is mandatory as is a good grounding in permaculture/sustainable agriculture, management skills, experience in Latin America and, most important of all, a sensitivity to the culture.

Volunteers are always welcome and the project is looking for hard workers who are willing to support the project and its goals. Accommodation is usually with families.