

Report December 2011

Centro Madre, Barlovento, Venezuela

Letter from the Director:

Centro Madre's agriculture project has developed wonderfully during the last six months. With the help of a loan from the Ministry of Agriculture (FONDAS) of Bs.F. 75,000 (about US\$9,000), we built a large, new house for the chickens that is 72 square meters, plus we fenced in an additional 450 square meters where they can freely roam. We have 100 young chickens which will start laying eggs in three months.

On our three and a half hectares of land we have planted many fruit trees: 900 plantain, 550 guava and 200 papaya trees. In addition we planted 200 sweet potato, 500 casaba and 50 ocumo root crops. We have doubled the guava nursery, so after the first batch of 3000 seedlings, we grew 6000 seedlings, and we have already sold 1500 of them.



Our two small ponds were stocked with 500 tiny cachama fish, 2 centimetres in length. Now they have all grown to be 5 centimetres long, as we observe and learn. We are growing 18 different varieties of vegetables in our 14 garden beds, each one 10 meters long and one meter wide. We have started our first batch of roses which we hope to sell commercially.

We also grow a little tobacco, which we mix with noni and neem leaves from our garden. We apply this as a biological deterrent against pests and fungus, which are quite persistent in this hot, humid climate.



School groups are coming to visit and learn with us. In the last month we gave a guided tour to a primary school class and a group of 16 physically and mentally disabled children, who enjoyed it very much. We have started to include activities that teach ecological awareness to the kids during these visits.



We are reaching out to different education programs to invite adult university

students from Misión Sucre to come and work with us as part of their volunteer social service requirement. Fifteen agriculture students, two professors and the vice rector of the University Argelia Laya of Higuerote came twice to learn apiculture from Nelson, who has become an expert beekeeper.



Cuban and Venezuelan agronomists come regularly to help us make Centro Madre a demonstration model of small scale sustainable agriculture. During the last month we received an average of 50 visitors each week.

Our two village libraries of books for children and young readers are always very popular.

Unfortunately, on October 31, four young masked men with guns broke into the house after sunset. I was alone with Melkys (12 years old) at the time, and they ordered us to lie down and they covered our heads. They then proceeded to steal everything of value, including two laptops and agriculture and construction machines and tools. At the end they tied us up, and drove off in our car. We both remained calm, and Melkys was very brave, which we believe helped avoid violence. The robbers abandoned the car three kilometres down the road, which we recovered. The material loss was in the range of Bs.F. 70,000 (approximately US\$15,000).

In spite of the obstacles and setbacks, I feel very inspired seeing the tremendous local interest and support that we have received over the last few months for Centro Madre. All donations in cash or kind allow us to help develop the project even more. What we have achieved so far could never have been accomplished without the generous donations we have been receiving through Stichting Centro Madre in the Netherlands.

Hendrika Renkers

For more information about Hendrika's work in Barlovento please refer to her website www.centromadre.org . You can also contact our Dutch organisation: www.centromadre.nl

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