



Agrovivienda – A Housing Project for Small Farmers in Masaya, Nicaragua

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PEDRO CARRANZA'S MODEL FARM

Prior to starting the housing project, a smaller project is planned in which a number of the farms will gain water cisterns for the first time. These will allow the farmers to conserve water and grow crops that otherwise they could not grow, augmenting their incomes and helping them to save towards the cost of their houses. One farmer, Pedro Carranza, already has a water cistern. He explains how this has helped him and how it fits into the overall conservation of water and soil in his farm

Don Pedro's farm is just a couple of acres in size. The house is at the top of a hill, and most of the farm occupies one of its slopes. Before he entered the farming project five years ago, Don Pedro explains that the farm had no trees, and much of the soil was washed away in the rainy season or blown away in the dry season. At that time he had a large cistern to collect rainwater as there was no mains supply. Often, the water ran out during the dry season.



The mains water he now has is a big advantage but the supply is intermittent, often coming only at night, sometimes failing for a week at a time. So he built a concrete cistern, 1m x 2.5m and about 60 cm deep. This saves enough water for his crops and can be filled when the mains supply is working. He keeps a separate plastic barrel for drinking water.



Pedro's daughter uses the cistern to water the plant nursery

With a constant water supply, he maintains a plant nursery. He specialises in flowering shrubs and fruit trees which he sells in Masaya market, pushing his cart for one hour along rough tracks to get them there.

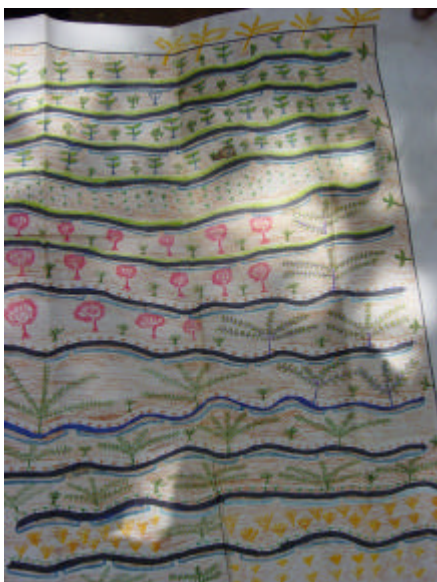
When Don Pedro explains how the farm as a whole works, it is evident that the water cistern is just part of a whole system for conserving the farm's resources and making the farm more

productive. The hillside is lined with terraces, which protect the soil from erosion, retain water in the rainy season and maintain the soil's humidity in the dry season. As well as the concrete cistern, the troughs that border each

Agrovivienda is a project supported by the Chartered Institute of Housing and the Leicester Masaya Link Group, to improve housing and living conditions amongst subsistence farmers in the region of Masaya, Nicaragua. For more information, visit www.cih.org or contact John Perry, project co-ordinator (jperry@ibw.com.ni). For information on how to make a financial contribution, contact Claire Plumb at 0116 223 2272 or email (leicester@masaya.fsworld.co.uk).



terrace direct rainwater into deep pits that retain the overflow. Most of the hillside is occupied by trees to produce fruit, firewood or timber. The house and yard are surrounded by a windbreak of trees to protect against the strong winds that blow across the hilltop. The leaves and other debris are allowed to cover the soil and help retain both soil and water.



Don Pedro has carefully retained the plans that he drew when he first joined the farming project and produced his ideas for how to develop his land. The latest drawing (left) shows the farm as it is now. It is something of a work of art in itself.

The effects of the water and soil conservation measures are obvious even to someone untrained in farming. Although it is almost the peak of the dry season, with daytime temperatures in the mid 30s, the soil on the hillside is dark and humid.

Don Pedro is able to explain the increase in productivity of his fruit trees, the profitability of his nursery and the improved diet and higher income which is family enjoys, all from his small parcel of land. He says that the family's position now, in relation to how it was in the days before the project, is 'without comparison'.

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