



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

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PROJECT MOVES TO EL POCHOTE

After completing seven houses in the last dry season, work stopped in May but can now restart with the coming dry season in January. Plans are being made to bring the project to a village south of Masaya called El Pochote. A public meeting has been held and already a large proportion of the village families are interested in one or more aspects of the project.

As we explained in earlier bulletins, one of the main aims of the housing project is that it is integrated with the sustainable farming work which ADIC – the local organisation – is carrying out. In El Pochote, the Leicester-Masaya Link Group has already been supporting a small project with 15 families to improve their rearing of chickens – it's called 'Project Egg'. The idea now is to build on that base to involve more families both in the farming work and the building projects. These consist of water cisterns (see bulletins 3 and 4), houses and - a new element – alternative energy supplies (see next page). A public meeting was held on 22 November, attended by nearly half of the families. Many were interested in houses, and a number as well in the other aspects.

On 9 December a pick-up truck load of people went from El Pochote to look at two of the houses built earlier this year, in Camino El Negro to the north of the city. They were able to talk to the families who built the houses, and see for themselves what 'houses of straw' look like. We discussed the costs, the monthly payments, and the contributions to the work that the families made, to keep the costs down.



The next stage will be a further meeting, probably before Christmas, to find out which families definitely want to start work in January.



One of the houses finished in May

Better straw bales

In November we paid a visit to Nandaime, the rice growing area (see picture) where the straw bales come from, to find out if we could improve their quality.

There is only one farmer in the area with a baling machine who sells bales, and his usual customers aren't people who want to build with them. We found that his machine would take stronger twine than the sort he normally uses, and could produce a denser bale more suitable for building. We plan to use these for the next phase.

**Solar energy in El Pochote**

Thanks to a grant from New Leaf, part of the Places for People Group, we now have a fund to install basic solar panel kits in houses in El Pochote. This part of Masaya has a history of problems with its electricity supply, and a basic solar panel kit will provide enough energy to fuel 2-3 light bulbs and (say) a radio for a few hours each evening and early morning.

Two alternative energy experts, Bob Matthew from Canada and Marc Ricart from Spain, have volunteered to help set up this aspect of the project. The first step is to install a portable kit, that can be moved from one house to another, so that people can see the panels in action and decide if they want them in their houses. As with other aspects of the project, payments will be made into a revolving fund so that the money is recycled.

Straw bales to be used more widely?

To our knowledge this is the first project in Nicaragua to construct a series of low-cost houses using straw bales. It is already attracting some interest. Several other projects now want to build with bales. A Swiss engineer commissioned by the national university to investigate alternative building methods in rural areas is going to recommend straw bale construction as one of the main options, having seen and examined the project.

Agricultural project in El Pochote

We want to extend the small chicken-rearing project (see picture) in El Pochote to more families and to bring in other aspects of farming such as growing crops (like maize, aubergines, beans) and cultivating fruit (mangoes, oranges, bananas). The Leicester-Masaya Link Group hopes to work jointly on an extended project with the Dutch city of Nijmegen, also linked with Masaya. LMLG needs to raise funds for its share of the costs. Donations are very welcome – see the information below or check out their website (<http://www.leicestermasayalink.org.uk/>).



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/nicaragua/index.htm 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).