



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

Bulletin No. 8

March 2005

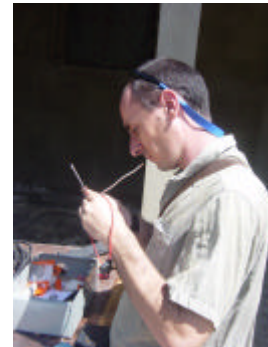
SOLAR ENERGY IN EL POCHOTE

As we said in bulletin no.7, a grant from New Leaf, a housing association which is part of the Places for People Group, will allow us to fund basic solar panel kits in houses in El Pochote. This bulletin explains how we set up the pilot scheme. It also reports on further help from the British Embassy in Costa Rica and on progress with the housing project.

El Pochote is a part of Masaya which has a history of problems with its electricity supply. 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. However, people are not used to solar electricity systems so our first step has been to set up a pilot kit which can be moved between houses, to show how the panels work.

The kit consists of two small panels, a battery, a small control system and cables serving low-energy bulbs and a socket. We set the first system up in three hours on Thursday 3 March in the house of Jorge and Erika, two participants in 'Project Egg' (funded by the Leicester-Masaya Link Group – see last bulletin). They are also building an extra room onto their house using the straw bale method (see over).

The photo on the right shows Marc Ricart, a Spanish electrical engineer working voluntarily on the project, completing the wiring of the panels. Below, one of the workers from ADIC (the local NGO running the project) mounts the panels on the roof of the house. When connected up, the panels (in the midday sun) immediately lit up the light bulbs and gave sufficient power to drive the radio. We are looking forward to receiving a lot of interest in the project as El Pochote's electricity supply is currently cut off, so people will naturally be inquiring about the one house that is now lit up at night time.



Four more houses built

Since December's bulletin, four more families have been building straw bale houses, all in different communities. The largest house so far, built by Consuelo Sequeira and her family of twelve in Las Cortezas, is 72 sq m – photo below. It is alongside land she is cultivating as part of one of ADIC's sustainable agriculture projects.



This brings the total of houses built through the Agrovivienda project to eleven – with more families expected to start building in the next few weeks before the rainy season starts in May.

Embassy to support agricultural project in El Pochote

The last bulletin reported that we want to extend the small chicken-rearing project 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 project received an unexpected boost when we heard from the British Embassy in Costa Rica that they are to send a £2,000 contribution. Since the closure of the embassy in Nicaragua, the ambassador in Costa Rica, Georgina Butler and desk officer Bruce Callow (on the left in the photo, visiting Consuelo's house) have kept a close interest in the project work. As a result, the projects have also been publicised in one of Nicaragua's national newspapers, *El Nuevo Diario* (see link below).



<http://www.elnuevodiario.com.ni/archivo/2005/febrero/16-febrero-2005/economia/economia-20050216-02.html>

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 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).