

# PLENTY BULLETIN

VOL. 22, NO. 4

WINTER 2006-07



Louise conducts a nutrition class for staff and patients at the hospital in Huejuquilla, Mexico. (photo by Cristina Curtessi)

## Nutrition Education in Mexico

By Louise Hagler

After installing a new Ultra Violet water filter, making a trial run with the new milk press, and training new staff to make the high protein pinole, my latest visit to the Centro Indigena Huichol Soy Alegre Soy Dairy in Mexico concentrated on nutrition and cooking classes. Ten classes were completed, including four at the hospital in Huejuquilla, two at the Huichol Center School, one at a local bakery for new products with soy, and three classes near Fresnillo, Zacatecas, for a total of about 225 students. The people in social services that we work with in the hospital in Huejuquilla let us know that using what we shared with them last time in recipes and information, they taught 34 more classes with 1304 participants. Some of the classes we presented this time focused on making soymilk and we handed out kilo bags of soybeans at the end of each class. Other classes focused on cooking with TVP (Texturized Vegetable Protein) as an alternative protein, which is readily available in Mexico and inexpensive. All the classes covered nutrition basics using our educational nutrition charts. We handed out booklets in each class with instructions and recipes including color photos illustrating the steps in producing each recipe.

Some of my most enthusiastic students were the children in the Huichol Center School. Even the boys showed enthusiasm and some cooking skills, demonstrating that the times are changing even in the Sierra Madre. All of them loved cooking and eating something they had made themselves.

Berta (Estreberta Carrillo Santillo) filled me in on the events of her and Imelda's (Imelda Cruz de la Rosa) trip to the workshops Plenty arranged for soy technicians in Nicaragua and Guatemala this past June (see *Plenty Bulletin*, Fall 2006). They were both very much inspired by the soy operations and the other technicians they met.



Students at San Miguel Village School with cabbage seedlings.

(photo by Lindsay Fromme)

## New Beginnings for Plenty Belize

By Lisa Wartinger

At Plenty Belize's first Annual General Meeting on November 17 in Punta Gorda Town, the attending members voted in its first all Belizean Board of Directors. This is a milestone for Plenty Belize. Until now we relied on an informal group of program partners in Belize (many of whom are now on the board) to help with program and management issues, along with the Plenty International Board of Directors. It's an evolution that follows our belief and working history of providing support to groups and efforts that, when the time is right, transition off from Plenty's management and become autonomous. From that point on they remain sister organizations to Plenty and more significantly, part of the growing global network of people and groups working for the common good.

In preparation for the meeting I reviewed Plenty's history in Belize over the years. Our involvement began in 1986 when we were contacted by Majeedah Rahman, an Oakland CA nutritionist who was invited to do soy nutrition education in Belize. Plenty helped her with fundraising and other support and during her time in country she spread the word about Plenty. Shortly afterwards, the Northern Corozol Soy Bean Producers, Garifuna Council, and Caribbean Organization of Indigenous Peoples contacted Plenty and asked for assistance in developing economic and food related projects with their member groups. Plenty received a grant from the Interamerican Foundation to send soy

See *Belize* p. 2

**PLENTY International is a nongovernmental relief and development organization.**

**Donations to PLENTY are tax-deductible.**

**• PLENTY, P.O. Box 394, Summertown, TN 38483 •**

**Phone: 931-964-4323 Email: <plenty@plenty.org> Web site: [www.plenty.org](http://www.plenty.org)**

## **Belize, cont. from p. 1**

and agriculture specialist Chuck Haren to Belize for four months, where he met with numerous farmers and farming groups and assisted many in developing projects. As a result of this initial work, Plenty decided to focus its assistance on local efforts in the Toledo District aimed at protecting the rainforest and alleviating malnutrition and poverty. After several years of rotating Plenty staff and volunteers, Plenty Belize became registered in 1997 as a Belizean non-governmental organization and established a small office. Our dear friend Michelle Spencer-Yates, who was working on women's development, linked up with Plenty Belize and became its first staff person. Assistance was provided to local groups like the Toledo Ecotourism Association, the Chairladies Fajina Association, the Toledo Maya Women's Council, farmer's groups, local schools, and health facilities. Traditional Birth Attendant training, solar installations and education, Hurricane Iris relief and more continued throughout the 1990's.

In 2002 Hurricane Iris cut a destructive swath through the rainforest and many of the villages of the Toledo District, and its impact on agriculture renewed local interest in developing school feeding programs. Plenty's GATE program began with organic school gardens in the four hardest hit villages. As more schools requested gardens, the program grew. Now, out of 30 school gardens in the entire country, Plenty has organized 23. It's been an organic process - schools come to Plenty and request help to establish a garden. We ask them to have a village meeting to determine whether there is enough support, and village members then must pick an area and put up fence posts to demonstrate their commitment to the garden. Then Plenty provides tools, seeds and extension support. In 2005, two-day teacher training workshops were included in the program. These training workshops are held during Christmas and Easter break. Three GATE schools have now graduated, and six more should graduate this year. Graduation means it has been determined that they no longer require Plenty's direct, hands-on assistance and supervision. The graduation ceremony brings the community together to talk about gardens, the environment, and nutritious foods, which are prepared and shared by all. The students and teachers of the school are recognized and credited for their work.

So here we are, 20 years after Plenty was first invited to Belize, and the program is still going, and growing. For the past several years, GATE has become the focus of Plenty Belize's work. There were deep insights shared at the AGM about the value of gardens and the overall effort that were humbling! Nana Mensah of Sustainable Harvest International said, "Planting teaches people to have patience in life and how to interrelate with friends, and live in a community with one another. Garden success is more than just the produce." Principal Transito Romero stated: "Gardens create a certain attitude in children that doesn't just deal with vegetables but with children as a whole... One day Plenty will cease to exist, and we want to see school gardens going on without Plenty support." Pulcheria Teul of the Toledo Maya Women's Council summed up the group's feeling of strength and resolve: "Toledo is always insulted

as the poorest district, but there is so much here...we want to build the attitude of self sustainability, and it should start with children. If children see they are more independent and responsible through providing their own food, this is a good strategy for development in this district. This will help us survive; we don't need to teach that we can't survive without help. We need to be smarter than that."

For this successful transition to take place, Plenty International will need to continue providing financial support for the foreseeable future. Right now Plenty provides 75% of Plenty Belize's operating expenses, made possible because of you, Plenty's donors, as well as some small foundation grants. We sincerely appreciate your contributions to this effort! (photo by Lindsay Fromme)



Plenty Belize garden extensionist, Abib Palma, teaches students how to transplant seedlings to a mulched garden bed at San Marcos Village School

## **A Gate Volunteer Tells Her Story**

**By Lindsay Fromme**

As a young, idealistic environmental studies student, I came to study this semester in Belize looking forward to the pristine rainforest, the fascinating wildlife and the rich culture. Upon my arrival, I became acutely aware of how threatened these gems actually are. Throughout my environmental studies career I have been pressed with the question of how to best go about preserving the environment and culture, and the answer that continuously arises to me is through education of the youth. My program requires an independent study project, and in my search for something meaningful I sought something related to environmental education and children. My hope was that by promoting environmental education for the youth of Belize, a more sustainable future could be ensured. I was fortunate enough to find an organization that was already involved with numerous projects that aligned with these ideals.

For five weeks this November I worked with Plenty Belize's GATE program, assessing the challenges, failures and successes by conducting case studies of six schools. I visited San Marcos, Little Flower, San Miguel, Columbia, Mafredi and Laguna several times throughout the course of my work, often tagging along with the field

*See Story, p. 3*



## Story, cont. from p. 2

extension representatives.

Having the opportunity to observe students working in the garden it was clear the amount of pride and hard work they put into it. I will forever be in awe of small children wielding heavy shovels, hoes and machetes. Although many of the gardens are not producing this early in the school year, the student's confidence in what they will reap makes me want to return to share in their harvest!

I found that although the program does face challenges with teacher's knowledge and interest in the garden, for the most part the program is successfully teaching children a sustainable, organic alternative to the farming they are used to. The majority of teachers were knowledgeable about gardening, either from prior agricultural experience, or from attending Plenty workshops, and most teachers used the garden as a hands on learning experience, by integrating garden themes into other areas of the curriculum. I met teachers that used gardening in science, health education, math and even language arts. The biggest challenges faced were most often those that can not be helped, such as weather, enormous class sizes, pests such as 'wee-wee' leaf cutter ants and pigs.

As Plenty Belize expands the GATE program to include more schools, more teachers will become knowledgeable about the garden, and it is more likely for the program to be sustained in the long run. The most unique thing about the GATE program is that it is set up to provide long term self-sufficiency. Visiting schools that have been graduated for several years now, like Laguna and Mafredi, it is clear that the program continues to be a success.

As an outsider, with no prior experience with international development work, it was truly inspiring to work with an organization that is not only making a difference, but empowering the local people to better care for their natural environment. I hope that in my next visit to Belize, all of the schools in the Toledo district will be involved with school gardening. And if I don't make it back for some time, I am confident that the children I have met this trip will have grown up to possess a sincere love for gardening and to be responsible stewards of their land.



(photo by Lindsay Fromme)

Students at Little Flower School in Forrest Home Village develop a garden bed with teacher, Diane Westby (right).

## ALTERNATIVE GIFT GIVING IDEAS

Please consider becoming a School Garden Partner! Make a donation in honor of someone special to you, and we will send both of you a card and photo acknowledging your donation.

\$25 sends a teacher to a Teacher Training Workshop on Organic School Gardens.

\$100 provides an extension officer for weekly education at one school for a month.

\$250 pays for the initial fencing and tools needed for a new school to get started.

\$350 sponsors a school garden for a month.

\$2,000 buys a motorcycle for extension work at the schools, and would save us transportation costs!

\$3,500 sponsors a school garden for one year.

*"Our school has a garden. Every Wednesday we go to the garden. We planted pumpkin, coco and pineapple in our garden. We have some vegetables in our garden. We are very proud of our garden. We have the best garden from everybody that has a garden. I want to know about your garden; thanks!" Your friend, Joaquin from Midway Village School*

(photo by Lindsay Fromme)



## PLENTY BELIZE WISH LIST!

Our work in Belize could greatly benefit by donations of the following items.

- \* Laptop computers to run off the solar power system we installed at San Jose Village School (working only please, minimum 700 MHz Pentium chip w/hard drive, cd drive).

- Power adapter to run off 12VDC solar / car / RV would be much appreciated.

- \* Digital video and still cameras for project documentation

- \* Educational DVDs for children

- \* Soil test kits for N,P,K

Please email <plenty@plenty.org> or send items to Plenty International, 116 4th Rd. Summertown, TN 38483.

Thanks



## Invitation to KTC Winter Program 2006

You are cordially invited to join us Thursday, December 21, 2006 for the Kids To The Country Holiday Gift-making Workshop and pre-Kwanzaa celebration at Centerstone's Hayes Building, 1101 Sixth Avenue North in Nashville. The event will run from 12:00 noon until 4:00 P.M. Come make gifts with the children and celebrate the spirit of the season with the dedicated program staff. We are grateful to have the opportunity to reconnect with the children and enable them to be givers themselves at holiday time. It is great fun to see the kids leave with big bags of hand-made gifts for their loved-ones. The second part of the program is a pre-Kwanzaa celebration which awakens the children to their personal talents and good principles to live by all year around. Gwynelle Dismukes will lead the celebration. Plans & preparations are in the works for this very valuable experience for all those who participate.

RSVP to Sizwe Herring (615-252-6953) or Mary Ellen Bowen (931-209-8119) or email <ktcfarm@usit.net>



### Katrina Relief: The Beat Goes On

Plenty Katrina Relief Field Director, Tony Sferlazza, is continuing our work in the Gulf, primarily engaged in rebuilding houses for the elderly and disabled, installing sheetrock, floors, kitchens and bathrooms, windows and doors so these residents can move back home. Tony's in New Orleans living in a trailer with another volunteer. He's in constant demand because honest, skilled, free construction labor is difficult to find and teams of volunteers need experienced supervision. In the photo above Tony is installing windows for the St. Bernard Parish Community Center which when completed will provide meeting space, free phone and Internet, laundry and distribution of food and clothing and other services to help the residents of St. Bernard Parish rebuild their lives and livelihoods. Only 20,000 residents (less than 30% of the pre-Katrina population) have returned to the Parish.

Plenty's 35 min. DVD, "Katrina Recovery: Stories of Volunteers Working To Save The Gulf Region" is available for \$10 and can be ordered directly from our website at [www.plenty.org](http://www.plenty.org).



Photos taken at KTC's Country Harvest Children's Village at the Farm in Tennessee, October 14, 2006.



(photos by Anita Whipple)

KTC senior counselor, Sadie Lee, leads one of the young folks on her horse..



Plenty volunteers, Elaine Langley and Jim Selin, collected toys for distribution during the holidays in the Gulf.