



# ACTS Newsletter

Americans Caring Teaching Sharing



[www.ActsHonduras.org](http://www.ActsHonduras.org)

Fall 2019

Many people ask us, is the Honduras we hear about in the news the same as the Honduras where you work? Do we see the desperation, the exodus to the U.S., and the violence?

The short answer is “yes, and no.” Global warming, chronic drought, and immigration have made life in Honduras fraught. With this annual ACTS Honduras newsletter, we’ll tell you more about what we’ve seen and the best opportunities to make a difference for families living in the area around El Rosario in the Locomapa region of Yoro, Honduras. Our goal is to help Hondurans improve their own communities so that adults and children can live with dignity caring for themselves in a sustainable way that is safe, healthy, and hopeful.

You are cordially invited to consider joining this effort by #1 reading the newsletter to learn about what’s going on and #2 donating to facilitate the work. ALL donations are used for Honduras; we have no employees or property. Your questions are always welcome!

Linda Kennedy, *President*

The fall 2018 corn crop was a complete failure, ACTS helped to support the bean crop

## AGRICULTURE

### Chronic Drought Becomes a Catastrophe

Agronomists and weather experts say Locomapa is in the “dry corridor” of Central America where rainfall was traditionally barely enough and is now insufficient. In late 2018, the entire corn crop failed in Locomapa. Corn, dried and ground to make tortillas, is half of the local diet. The other half is beans that are dried and cooked in every home, three meals a day. When the corn crop failed, families had no corn to eat and in a double whammy, no corn to sell. Without cash from selling corn, they had no resources to plant the next crop – the beans. They were literally facing starvation and economic ruin.

The time for planting beans is short and is tied to the normally rainy season in late fall. ACTS recognized a very real need with a short timeline.

Moving quickly, in consultation with the El Rosario Micro Bank and local leaders, ACTS made an unbudgeted donation of \$25,000 to fund planting the bean crop. We held our breath in hope the traditional rains would come and the bean seeds would germinate. We monitored the weather by satellite and WhatsApp calls to the village. The report was good; it was raining, and the beans were growing. According to Nelson Mejia who led the funds distribution, “People are happy that they will have food.”

The per family cost of this rescue was \$71.

We thought, we need to think bigger and better.

### STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- Jinny Brack, pediatrics and primary care, Hanover NH
- Suzanne Burgos, primary care, Bethel VT
- Michael Harris, educational administration, Etna NH
- Robert Keene, global health, dentistry, Etna NH
- Linda Kennedy, agriculture, infrastructure, cancer prevention, Thetford Center VT
- Ethan LaRoche, education, technology, Hanover NH
- Betsy Rybeck Lynd, agriculture, education, Plainfield NH
- Peter Mason, primary care, public health, Lebanon NH
- Theresa Mundy, education, Lyme NH
- Juliana Ortego, teen leadership, NYC NY
- Jennifer Randolph, organizational data, Hanover NH
- John Sanders, medicine, Lyme NH
- Dan Saulnier, infrastructure, agriculture, water systems, Springfield NH
- Hart Silverwood, treasurer, Lee NH
- Brad Taylor, agriculture, Ithaca NY
- Helen Whyte, community organizer, Manchester, VT
- Dean Seibert, active emeritus, Norwich VT

## ACTS in the News

Journalist Georgina Gustin of *Inside Climate News* was embedded with ACTS in March to talk with farmers away from the media attention given to gangs in Honduras. Georgina's investigation of farming life as related to climate change made an award-winning piece titled *Ravaged by Drought, a Honduran Village Faces a Choice: Pray for Rain or Migrate*. For a comprehensive report on climate and farmers in the dry corridor read it at <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/08072019/climate-change-migration-honduras-drought-crop-failure-farming-deforestation-guatemala-trump>

Scan code for the story:



## Making Plans for a Better Agricultural Future

Worldwide, there are thousands of agricultural interventions being tested. Each is geographically and culturally specific. It is a little like the Goldilocks story – this one is too big, and this one is too small. We are in the hunt for a program that fits “just right.” Dan Saulnier and Betsy Rybeck Lynd have been leading this effort and in December, Dan will meet in El Rosario with experts in hydrology, soil science, and agronomy to consider possible interventions for the tangle of problems including insufficient rainfall, primitive

planting methods and overuse of agricultural chemicals, tired soil, steep slopes, no fallow fields, and poor connection to markets. The families are desperate for change and open to new techniques but will need careful coaching.

## The Agricultural Facility

In 2017 we launched a facility to reduce farming families' exposure to agricultural chemicals. Only men work in the fields, but families were exposed because these costly chemicals were stored under their beds. When farmers returned home after spraying chemicals, their clothing and skin was soaked with the chemicals. Sitting on the furniture, picking up children, and putting their laundry in the family's pile all were risky and likely to contaminate the rest of the family.

The Kennedy-Taylor Agricultural Facility, named by the farmers, provides safe storage for agricultural chemicals, free personal protective equipment (masks, goggles, gloves), plus a shower and sinks to wash clothes and equipment. A year ago, we documented more than 100+ users.

This year, its impact has increased, and farmers are teaching each other about what they have learned. Recently, a 38-year-old farmer had a toxic reaction when spraying incorrectly and was rushed to the hospital. He is now a vocal educator for his peers and others are listening to his story.

## HEALTH

### Expanding the Jornada Concept to Pediatrics

Since 2013, with Dartmouth's Norris Cotton Cancer Center and La Liga Contra Cancer in Honduras, we've been developing the “jornada” concept for large-scale cancer screening of many participants on a given weekend. Over time, there have been thousands of screenings for people from 40 villages; lives have been saved. In 2018, a highly successful Vision Screening Jornada restored sight for elders with cataracts and provided reading glasses to virtually everyone over 40.

In 2019, led by ACTS pediatrician Jinny Brack, we adapted the jornada concept for screening children from birth to school-age for vision, hearing, general physical condition, growth, and cognition in a Kids Jornada. In this pilot of well-child screening in the region, Jinny and colleagues identified children with undiagnosed ailments, preschoolers who will need to sit in the front of the class to see, undernourished children, and children requiring referral for specialty care. The Kids Jornada was a feat of clinical management. Imagine, one



**This tiny patient with a rare defect in her digestive tract has benefited from special nutrition and growth checks since birth; her final surgery is coming up soon.**

mother, six children, and MDs testing each and recording 20 data points. With epic planning sessions and plenty of savvy, the team is ready for a bigger Kids Jornada in December.

### Special Needs Donations

Though the people of Locomapa live in simple homes and eat basic diets, they have the same complicated medical conditions that we do. Our clinic in El Rosario is staffed full-time by nurse Nolvía and on Saturdays by Dr. Alyssa. They have the most comprehensive and well-stocked pharmacy in the region and adequate clinical space and equipment.

Those who can afford it, pay a small fee to see the doctor or nurse and for their prescriptions. Those who cannot afford it are treated without charge and travel to and from the clinic with free bus tickets.

But there is still a gap. Families facing complex medical conditions need extra assistance to meet Special Needs. We've encountered these recently: a small baby being tube-fed needed special formula; a child confined to bed because of hydrocephalus and seizure disorder needed a special mattress to prevent pressure ulcers (bedsores), and funds for transportation and family lodging for a child with a rare bone condition (osteogenesis imperfecta) requiring care in San Pedro Sula.

The Special Needs Donation fund allows the local Clinic Committee to respond in time of dire Special Needs.

### New Option for Family Planning

The Honduran government has made the “copper 7” intrauterine device (IUD) available to clinics for a very reasonable price. ACTS

obtained a supply of IUDs and the equipment necessary to place them in women who choose that option. There is no charge for the IUD and it can be removed at any time should the woman decide she would like to become pregnant.

Other than abstinence, condoms provide the best option to prevent sexually transmitted infections. Outside the pharmacy window at the Clinic there is always a box full of condoms free for the taking.

### Update on Ilda's Family

We've been sharing updates for years on Ilda and her family of three children seriously disabled by the genetic disease homocystinuria. The disease manifests at age 4 and in her children, it has produced blindness, severely limited speech and cognition, and multiple physical challenges. Last year we were worried when Ilda, who cares for the kids with the help of two healthy daughters, and earns small wages doing laundry for others, contracted TB. ACTS was supportive and she regained her health. Sadly, now her eldest daughter with homocystinuria has TB and has been hospitalized off and on. The entire family is now being treated in conjunction with the local health department, but their existence is fraught. To give Ilda a hand with her endless chores and ensure nutrition for the patient, we are funding nutritious hot meals cooked and delivered daily by a neighbor.



**Together, John Sanders, Bob Keene and Peter Mason provide more than a century of expertise and caring to patients and learners in Honduras**

### Dental Health

A dental team led by Bob Keene DMD will be traveling to Honduras in February to engage with Dra. Reina Lara and observe her work with ten elementary schools in the region. We look forward to assessing the oral health education and preventive practices and working with her to make the oral health interventions as robust and sustainable as reasonable in that environment. In addition to school programs, Dra. Reina cares for dental patients at the Smile Clinic in El Rosario three days per month.

### Taking Care of Moms

The Margot Krasnoff Fund generously provided funding for our new program Taking Care of Moms. Young mothers will meet

monthly for a curriculum ranging from breastfeeding and post-partum depression to getting enough sleep with a newborn. To promote better nutrition, meetings will include a nutritious lunch. Nurse Nolvía will be a key educator and TCOM will build lines of communication between her and the moms. Stay tuned!

### Adding Infrastructure for Health

In El Rosario, families have had ACTS-funded latrines for more than 15 years. But in Chaguite, there are 6 latrines among 120 families. In August, Linda Kennedy met with their leaders to discuss a team building project to build latrines for every family within one year. This would be like a traditional New England barn raising involving everyone in the joint effort. The leaders were excited, and they envision building the latrines sector by sector.

Latrines for all the families in Chaguite will be \$9000, half has been donated by Hanover Rotary Club.

### Water for Families

Women in the communities of Ocotal and Potrerillos do not have reliable, clean, safe water to use for drinking, cooking, and cleaning. Without *good* running water, families suffer the diseases that come from unclean conditions – diarrhea, scabies, lice, intestinal parasites, and others. Women are forced to make choices about water based on the family's financial resources. Some families can afford to buy bottled water. Many boil the water they consume or chlorinate (sometimes inexpertly) with tablets. Others use river water, sometimes with tragic results.

The 4-phase Ocotal Water Project is our ambitious effort to bring water from a source *three miles* from the village, across varied terrain, to a holding tank that will dispense water to each home. Professional engineers, mostly Northeastern University alumni previously in El Rosario as undergraduates with Engineers Without Borders Northeastern University, have taken on this project with ACTS. Men from the community supply labor.



**Local men tackle thick jungle to start digging for the source box**



**The source box is deep and the digging requires strength and determination**

Phase 1, completed in 2019, captured two mountainside springs. Phase 2 is now funded, and this winter the team will bring the water via a 3-mile pipeline to Ocotal. Phases 3 and 4, including a river-crossing, construction of the storage tank, and pipes to every home, will be completed in 2020 and 2021. The total cost of the Ocotal water project is estimated to be \$60,000.

## ORGANIZATIONAL UPDATES

### HUNDREDS OF POUNDS OF DONATIONS

Dean Seibert discovered that we could use free military transport on training flights to move larger items to Honduras. Dean's multi-ton shipment of everything from fire-fighting equipment to gardening tools shipped out in late September for distribution in Honduras.



**Dean Seibert and the military gang that packed an airplane with donations for Honduras**

### EDUCATION

The Education Committee's interests are broad including helping teens prepare for work outside of farming by supporting free English and computer classes. English teacher Cesar joined the Rassias Institute in July for training in teaching English as a Second Language. Dean Seibert is working with women to plan a demonstration garden of vegetables to supplement the typical diet. Rubi Simon, of Howe Library in Hanover, will examine the "traveling library" boxes circulating among schools and demonstrate options for library-based community activities for all ages. Betsy Rybeck Lynd and a team of teachers will bring new teaching tools with math resource kits for fractions and decimals. News Flash – the Internet is now available and provides many new opportunities for teaching and learning.

### SHARING OUR SUCCESS WITH OTHER PARTNERS

This year, we have been proud to partner with and assist excellent organizations from Honduras to New England to help rural Hondurans improve their own lives.

**Engineers Without Borders Northeastern University, Undergraduate and Alumni Chapters** – water systems

**The Dorothy and Jack Byrne Foundation** – funds *La Fuerza para el Futuro*

**Liga Contra Cancer from Honduras** – cancer screening, treatment, research, and their PESCA program

**Dartmouth's Norris Cotton Cancer Center** – cancer screening and research

**Dartmouth-Hitchcock Pathology** – research partnership to prevent cancer

**Keene State University** – dietetic interns

**Hanover NH Rotary Club** – funding latrine building

**Krasnoff Foundation** – funding for Taking Care of Moms

**Honduran Foundation for Investigation of Agriculture (FHIA)** – agricultural extension agency

**Zondervan Foundation** – library support and promotion of reading at home, vision screening

### LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

December 2018 marked the 10th year of the *Fuerza para el futuro* youth leadership program. Led again this year by Jules Ortego, forty Honduran teens enjoyed a week with Dartmouth College and Stanford Graduate School of Business students learning about leadership and community service. The curriculum focused on nutrition, a growing concern in the region. Teens worked hard to construct safety boxes for the storage of agricultural chemicals. This followed last year's *Fuerza* education on the dangers of storing agricultural chemicals at home. The teens had energy and enthusiasm, taking ownership of their projects with pride.



**After a week of work, more than 100 child-safe chemical storage boxes were delivered to local families**



**The teens learned about nutrition and then took their expertise "on the road" to other villages**

**NH Charitable Trust** – facility to reduce agricultural chemical exposure

**Coverys Community Foundation** – education and management to reduce agricultural chemical exposure

**Partners of the Americas** – funding for travel to USA to attend Rassias course

**The Rassias Foundation** – immersion programs in teaching English

**Lyme NH Congregational Church's Bargain Barn, United Church of Dorset VT and East Rupert's Rummage Sales, The Woodlands of Lebanon NH** – donated clothing

**US Airforce, Vermont** – transport of donated goods to Honduras

**Lyme NH Talent Show** – donation of proceeds

**Universidad Católica de San Pedro Sula** – academic partner, medical students, institutional review board

**The fire departments of Hanover and Springfield NH, Thetford and Windsor VT** – firefighting equipment