

ADVENTURES FROM THE FIELD.....**Author: Dr. Harold Ledermueller, OVC' 73, Kirkton Veterinary Clinic**

Last year, I had the opportunity to travel to Guatemala with Guatemala Hope, a Non-Government Organization (NGO), involved in providing aid to several villages on the Pacific coast of Guatemala. Projects include building homes and cooking stoves, piped water to all the homes, strengthening education, medical support, and women's social groups. Last year, the group decided to become involved in the local agriculture and I was asked to join to provide veterinary advice. February 2013 will be my third trip and each trip lasts ten to fourteen days. We stay in tents in the yard of a local school principal and our cooks use his kitchen to provide us with meals. Food is purchased in a local town. My tent was under a mango tree; fresh mangos every morning!

Each farmer owns (squats?) about five acres of land, they are able to grow three crops per year; there is a rainy season in the fall and dry season late winter. Crops include corn, sesame seed, okra, peanuts, plantain, and banana. Land is worked by tractor, but seeding and harvest is by hand. Labour is paid 50 Quetzales (\$1CAN = 8Q) per day. In local economics, this will buy five beers in the village or two beers in the city!

Cattle are Zebu/Brahma cross and herd size varies from 2 to 10 per owner. The cows spend the day on pasture with their calves and are brought into corals in the village at night. The calves are tied up at night and the cows milked in the morning before the calves are allowed to join them. Milk is used for personal consumption and cheese production. The cows are bred by bull, calving interval is 1-2 years. All the cattle are gentle, probably because they are handled so much as calves. Health issues appear to be infrequent; anaplasmosis and anthrax occur occasionally, flies and ticks are common in the dry season. Very little parasite control and vaccination is done due to a lack of money. There is no veterinary service in the area. If there is a sick cow, the animal's owner travels to the nearest town, several hours away, to a veterinary pharmacy. The owner describes the symptoms of the sick animal to a lay person who then sells him the treatment. The size of the herd is limited by the carrying capacity of the pasture in the dry season and the amount of crop residue they can acquire. There is no stored feed. The herds appear to be the capital reserve for the farmer, he sells an animal only when he needs extra cash.

The farmers live in the village, rather than on the land. Pigs and chickens run freely throughout the village, therefore there is little opportunity to grow gardens. As a new initiative, we provided seed money to four villagers to each build two concrete pig pens, buy two high genetic sow piglets from a breeder, and supply enough feed to raise them and their first litter. Part of the agreement encourages them to meet regularly to discuss common problems and successes. When they sell the piglets, they repay half the loan which will provide seed money for more small scale swine operations. I am looking forward to seeing their progress this winter.

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