

Pontis Nicaragua Annual Report 2018 and Update



Date of Report: March, 2019

OVERVIEW AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Pressing on Through Perilous Times

2018 started out strong with 5 new Pontis trained technicians in the field, a new training location getting off to a good start in the Matagalpa Province at Siempre Viva, Tuma-La Dalia, and a prospective expansion into Alta Gracia on the Island of Ometepe.



At that time, we had 88 students, 8 classes being conducted per month, 78 farms under technical advisement, 76 manzanas (132 Acres) in production and supervision.

Our El Faro collaboration at Cristo Rey, Tipitapa was developing solidly with a handful of students and the model farm there, sponsored by El Faro and NeoFund of Portland Oregon, developing well.

Then There Was April

In April, hundreds, then thousands, then many thousands of students, business men and women, campesinos, and other citizens erupted in massive protests against the current regime. The tipping point was created by the a combination of factors. First was the failure of the government to properly suppress a wildfire in the Indio Maiz Biological Reserve destroying more than 12,000 acres of pristine reserve. Secondly, and more prominently recognized, was the decision by the administration to increase social security taxes and reduce benefits without following an open democratic process.



The protests were met with aggressive repression from government contingents both official and unofficial which resulted in numerous assassinations and imprisonment in large numbers. Citizens and resistance groups blockaded cities to limit access by government forces, to force the nation to a halt, and amplify their voice.

In July, government supported paramilitary squads and police invaded city by city to remove the barricades at gun point. Some protesters were also armed and on July 7th, they entered Matagalpa where Pontis management is based. There was a gunfight in the streets from 8:00 in the evening till daylight the next morning. By that time, virtually all the barricades had been removed and critical traffic choke points were overseen by armed guards.

Many Missionaries and Aid Organizations Left Nicaragua

Those whose work was dependent on visiting teams were hit the hardest. Travel into Nicaragua was greatly reduced. Tourism came to a screeching halt. We had one team scheduled at the time and we determined it was not safe for them to come.

Pontis had to adapt but was not stopped by any means

In God's kind providence we were able to work through the turmoil. Two factors contributed to this. First, our operations and our funding are not team dependent. Second, in 2017 we had trained 5 new technicians from among our most promising students who live among the people. This meant that, even though our Chief Agronomist Ernesto Martinez could hardly leave his home because of the unrest nearby, he could communicate with our technicians and they could continue to work on the farms and with the gathered students on a somewhat reduced schedule.

There were times when we had to cancel our classes because we received word that the authorities were planning to raid the meetings and arrest some who were thought to be among the protestors or to have aided the protestors. At least one of our students went into and remains in hiding.

Blessed to be in the Food Business

In times of deep distress, what better industry to be involved in than the food business? No matter how difficult things get, people must eat. And when trucks can't deliver to the supermarkets, the role of the small farm producer designed to meet the demands of the local market is even more critical to the wellbeing of the community. Because of this, our producers were hardly required to break stride compared to the collapsing economy around them. Even if reduced to a barter economy, food is a precious and marketable commodity.

Pontis' Avenue for Influence

The fact that God put us in the food production industry here means that our services will always be needed, and since there is a humanitarian element to our work, we still find open doors in times of crisis. Our ID Badges, which read Mision Cristiana Humataria, served us well when navigating our way through the barricades.

We Are Here to Stay

We have been given a task by God and it is not finished so we haven't even considered pulling up stakes and returning to the States.

I wish you could have seen the faces in Nueva Esperanza and Ometepe when I was able to get through the barricades and meet with them in June to assure them that we are here to stay and would stand by them through thick and thin.

Activity/Productivity Measurements

Beginning of 2018

- Training Locations: 3 (Ometepe, Nueva Esperanza, Tipitapa)
- Students in Training: 88
- Acres in Production: 133
- Farms Under Supervision: 78

End of 2018

- Training Locations: 2 (Ometepe, Nueva Esperanza)
 - We were unable to service the small Tipitapa El Faro program during the most intensive

crisis period for safety considerations. By the time we were able to reengage, the client informed us they had acquired other technical assistance. Their 3 manzana (5.34 acre) farm was prospering at the time and benefiting greatly from our training and land reclamation program.

- Students in Training: 69
- Acres in Production: 160
- Farms Under Supervision: 66

Current Status (March 2019):

- Training Locations: 8 (Ometepe 5, Matagalpa 3)
- Students in Training: 106
- Acres in Production: 91
- Farms Under Supervision: 69

500 Certificates of Completion have been awarded since 2013 for students completing one of our four available small sustainable farm modules and **5 for the Certified Agricultural Technician** training program.

Family Financial Impact

In the initial stages of plan development 2003 – 2008 our target monthly income for a family was to provide a disposable income of from \$450 - \$650 per month. This was after setting aside funds for the upcoming crops, tithing off the net, setting aside for contingencies, repayment on the loan, and a token fee for Pontis advisory services.

The original pastor/rice farmers with whom we began with on Ometepe were making about \$650 per year from their rice crops. With our training and provision of new seed, they doubled and tripled their production in the following season. Our Agronomists and Technicians now estimate that a typical family with Pontis training and technical assistance can produce an annual disposable income of \$2,500 - \$3,000 per year on 7 acres. **Our goal is to reach the poorest 1/3 of the island's 30,000 population with this program over the coming years.**

Pontis' Work is Valued by Others

Pontis works collaboratively with other like-minded organizations such as Grow-Nicaragua of Kentucky on Ometepe and NeoFund of Oregon in Tipitapa. Werkhof Darmstadt e.V., a German NGO, requires all their loan recipients on Ometepe to be actively engaged in the Pontis training program to qualify for funding. We are empowering the poor to access other resources beyond our own.

Program Expansion

The key to Pontis expansion in Nicaragua is the development of qualified technicians and expansion of training sites. In 2018, in the midst of the civil turbulence, we were able to maintain 2 locations, 1 on Ometepe and 1 in Nueva Esperanza (El Tuma, Matagalpa). We lost one site at Tipitapa, but it did continue to operate on its own and the collaborative partner there has obtained the services of another technician to advise them on their farm. In 2019, our 5 technicians are expanding to new locations with smaller groups of students and we have begun training 6 new technicians to assist them.

Pontis Impact on a Personal Level



From the mountain community of Nueva Esperanza –

Perhaps the most profound expression of gratitude came from Deyvin Brenes who, after saying that the Pontis training had helped him make his farm more productive and more profitable, also said, “Thank you for helping me to learn and to become a different person.”



On Isla de Ometepe - Nataniel (center) showed us his wonderful plantain plantation recently. His neighbor’s farm was ruined by a pervasive fungus but Nataniel’s stood healthy and productive, in part because of the practices and products (organic fertilizer, for example) that he had received through Pontis.



Loan recipients like Juana Luquez and her family are prospering because you have empowered them. Juana is shown here with Vilgenza, sons Elton and Carlos (Pontis Students) and Edwin.



Qualified to Serve - Technicians like Pastor Francisco Sotelo now have marketable skills that have enabled them to obtain work outside of the Pontis program, expanding their earning power. Francisco's certificate reads that he has satisfactorily completed training in the Pontis Sustainable Agriculture Technician and is "qualified to serve the public as an Agricultural Technician."



Yader Lopez works with his father, Jose Luis, on the El Faro Farm in Tipitapa.



At a recent Women’s Dinner in Nueva Esperanza, our dear friend Beatriz came to our Pontis women and said, “We have been in this community for eleven years. Since you began to work with us about five years ago, you have never abandoned us, and we have not felt alone. You have never left us in good times or bad.”

Financials

2017

Beginning Cash Balance: \$ 17,800

Income - \$135,000

Donations Received: \$105,000

Other income (Mortgage owned, Miscellaneous other): \$ 30,000

Expenses - \$163,120

Operations: \$145,041

Management: \$ 17,455

Fund Raising: \$ 624

2018ⁱ

Beginning Cash Balance: \$ 1,730

Income - \$154,270

Donations Received: \$119,880

Receipts from Consultation and Collaborative Services provided to others: \$ 2,990

Other income (Mortgage owned, Miscellaneous other)ⁱⁱ: \$ 31,400

Expenses - \$134,880

Operations: \$116,190

Management: \$ 18,000

Fund Raising: \$ 690

2019 Budget: \$180,000

Beginning Balance: \$ 31,800

Income to ate: \$ -29,420

Combined Funds to Date: \$ 61,630

Future Funds Mortgage Asset: \$ 22,500

Required to Meet Budget: \$ 95,870

What's Next?

Technician Development

For 2019, we will grow our team of Technicians from 5 to 10 or more. This enables us to continue to expand the areas reached by our training initiatives and to provide more in person service to our Program Participants at their farm locations.

More Training Locations

Having suffered some consolidations of training groups and the loss of one location, in 2019 we are targeting an expansion of the number of training locations to a total of 8 with 5 on Isla Ometepe and 3 in Matagalpa.

Business Development

Alongside direct work in the development of sustainable small farms through training and onsite advisory service, we are developing agriculturally related businesses that will put our students to work, providing new avenues for professional development and income generation. At present these include the establishment of a Water Well Drilling Service and an Agricultural Products Distributorship.

Well Drilling

Our well drilling operations were stagnated last year by the civil disruption and the need to make improvements in our drilling rig. Changes to the rig are almost complete and we will very soon begin drilling wells for hire, with a for-profit business that includes a significant charitable component which will allow us to place wells on our participant farms at a greatly reduced rate.

Agricultural Products Distribution

We are presently in the process of establishing under the name SABIO (wise) Agricultural Products which will begin with the distribution of SABIOrganic, a liquid organic fertilizer produced from grocery store waste in the US. Having thoroughly tested the product and analyzed its market potential, this will not only provide a high quality, eco friendly product for the Nicaraguan agricultural industry but will provide jobs for our trainees, again expanding their opportunities to develop professionally with expanded income opportunities.

Thank you for making this impactful and enduring work possible.

Will you join forces with us?

You can give in the following ways:

Mail your gift to:

Pontis, Inc.

PO Box 136368

Fort Worth, Texas 761136

Or give electronically at:

<https://pontisnicaragua.org/donate/>

ⁱ Rounded to the nearest \$10

ⁱⁱ Miscellaneous income includes such sources as income from team activity, fees received for consultancy services rendered