Sesame seeds are coming into the sesame processing plant... over a million pounds, at this writing, and are continuing to come in daily!

After renovating and operating the sesame plant poco a poco with a diesel generator for months because we could not get hooked into the electric grid, we finally paid the electric company over $30,000 to connect the electricity in order to process the million (and growing) pounds of sesame.

There is a lot of interest from other agriculture businesses for us to process their sesame as well as the sesame from our growers, which is necessary to make the plant viable.

Over the holidays we, with our adult children, took a tour of the sesame processing plant. Mike described how the sesame is cleaned, hulled, cleaned again, dried, dried again, and goes through a last inspection in a clean room. He also expanded on one of our goals this year, not only to secure the viability of the plant, but also to make the plant more environmentally green by:

1) Creating and installing a filtering system to clean waste water before the water goes back into the aquifer and then
2) Using the solids from the waste water to make organic fertilizer;
3) Retrofitting a diesel water heating unit to burn propane; and
4) Putting in a solar hot water heater to preheat the water before it goes into the propane burner, thereby reducing the need for fuel… this we hope will be in place in the next few months.

After all of us piled back on the bus, Jessica turned around and looked at Mike and said, “Daddy, that is wicked cool.” Yes, it is.

Other harvests:

The organic coffee harvest is going well and we expect to be shipping over 30,000 pounds to our buyers in the States.

We limited the amount of peanuts planted this year to ensure that the quality is high, and we feel like that has been accomplished. In the next few months we will be shipping about 16 containers of organic peanuts.

Cotton was greatly affected by the drought during the last growing season (the worst in 32 years) thereby making it late to come in and we expect the yields to be way down, which is affecting the seasonal workers in the cotton gin. But…

We’ve been selected by Agora Partners as one of 15 businesses across Latin America to participate in a project that is designed to help groups like us to get into a room to pitch our business to people with money looking for investments. They will help us get the business plan for the fair trade, organic cotton value chain up to contemporary standards. They will teach us how to talk about our business to entice investors and put us in the room with them… and this is what we have been lacking for so long to make this project work.

Besides all the above agriculture and economic development projects and goals, in 2015 we also are working towards:

- the sesame processing plant having all its pertinent certifications;
- launching a new project to enable small farmers to greatly increase their annual income;
- adding value to the sesame by pressing sesame cooking oil and maybe castor oil as well; and…
- creating a two-phase project to first improve family nutrition in rural areas by helping them to produce fruits and vegetables, and then selecting the best producers in that group to grow for national markets.

In the health clinic, we were fortunate to have an infectious disease doctor come with the Bucknell Brigade in January (Lewisburg, PA). We have six HIV positive patients (three are children) and have learned there are at least ten more (and probably way more who are untreated) in Nueva Vida. One of our 2015 goals is to set up support groups for these people and provide transportation for them to go for their monthly check-ups and their antiretroviral medications in Managua. Currently we provide all other medications and supplements for our HIV patients.

One of the many things the Bucknell Brigade worked on was making concrete posts for the third clinic building and preparing the foundation for an equipment storage shed. We hope to break ground on the third building this year and raise much of the $80,000 needed for construction materials. We have redrawn the plans again and again to have what the clinic staff thinks will serve our ever-growing needs.
Many of our 2015 goals for the clinic lie in these areas:

- obtaining new equipment to improve care, such as a new suction unit for the dental rooms [thanks to ORPHANetwork and Solvang Rotary Club!] which is only one piece of equipment among many;
- revamping our preventive care… we continue to do well and have the help of two long-term volunteers, Jolien and Courtney, but there is tremendous need in women’s care, type 2 diabetes, asthma, etc.; and
- going into the community more for teaching, home care, ultrasounds, and organizing.

All of this important work requires funds. As is usually true, last year three-fourths of all our donations were $100 or less. We depend on many people like you to support this work with what you have.

Usually at the end of a year we are well in the black financially, because much of the year’s funding comes at the end of the year, and is carried over. However, this year we ended up without a surplus, which means that we are entering a new year with wonderful projects needing your support. We hope you will consider supporting the CDCA… and these are just a couple of reasons why…

The sesame plant employs 75 people and processes sesame grown by 3,000 small growers. This plant not only provides work for 75 people but also ensures that farmers get fair prices for the crops they worked so hard to cultivate, which means they can buy shoes, clothes, medicines, and other basic needs for their families.

Our clinic provides inhalers, nebulizers, and medications for patients with asthma. These patients are mostly children who have a hard time breathing due to outside and inside air pollution caused by the realities of poverty… poorly ventilated wood-burning cook stoves, burning their trash, dust blowing or mold growing, and the city dump burning everything (including plastics) near Nueva Vida. They depend on the clinic to breathe… literally. Thanks to the Irish Quaker Faith in Action we have received money to expand this project! We have many projects in the clinic that serve the ever-growing needs of diabetic patients, women, children, etc.

JHCommunity:

Daniel saved us when our scheduled volunteer coordinator for 2015 dropped out at the last minute. He is taking a year off from dental school to be our new VC and is doing a fantastic job. Becca loves being his boss because so little has to be explained or taught.

Sarah is getting ready to vacate the premises to go on her annual spring speaking tour… this year in the Southeast of the U.S… we are all working hard to get her ready.

You can find her schedule here: http://jhc-cdca.org/how-to-help/upcoming-speaking-opportunities/

Eibhlín and Orla are excited to be going back to school. Joseph has been accepted at Bennington College (VT) for the fall. Coury has moved to Sacramento, working as a medical interpreter, to be with his girlfriend, Cassie, who is finishing her residency.

We all enjoyed having family here with adult children (Tiff and Jessica), parents (Tom and Nancy), grandchildren (Elliot and Charlotte), and loved ones over the holidays.

Reflected:

Do you ever have those flashes of “Aha!” when you read some particular passage or hear someone talk and you experience a light bulb clicking on? I remember an “Aha!” moment when I read for the umpteenth time John 4:18, “love banishes all fear.” It dawned on me that hatred was rooted in fear and fear was the opposite of love… click! The light bulb.

It happened again last November watching The Colbert Report when his guest, Bryan Stevenson said, “The opposite of poverty is not wealth. The opposite of poverty is justice.”… click! The light bulb!

We get confused as to what causes poverty. We are told it is laziness, bad breeding, no motivation, no creativity, no capital, no this or that. Some of the more enlightened of us may even say, “There but for the grace of God, go I!”
In 2014 the CDCA celebrated being in Nicaragua for 20 years! We shared the Top 20 Accomplishments of the last 20 Years in our blogs (if you are interested, see http://jhc-cdca.blogspot.com/2014/12/givingtuesday-20-years-20-dollars.html). It was a good exercise for us: in the day-to-day grind it is hard for us to recognize when goals are actually met because there is always so much more to do.

2014 was no different in that regard. Even though we have made great strides in many areas, too many needs remain. Without your gifts the work could not go on. Please read our 2014 Year End Summary below and see all the wonderful things that YOU helped accomplish with your gifts. Please consider continuing to support the work of the CDCA in 2015 as we work in partnership with Nicaraguans to lift the crushing weight of poverty and disease.

- COPROEXNIC, the organic agriculture cooperative, leased the sesame processing plant, employing 21 workers (now up to 75 employees in 2015).
- The sesame plant has undergone tremendous renovations to make it a world class processing plant.
- The Vida Fund was able to make loans of $526,140 in 2014. (FYI: In the last 20 years we have loaned out $5.3 million! Most were credits to small farmers.)
- Loan payments and interest received in 2014 were $1,034,832.
- We helped COPROEXNIC export 4 containers of organic cotton… 128,403 pounds from 2013’s crop. This year’s organic cotton, coming in right now, is from 360 acres.
- The gin employed 28 full-time workers for 6 months.
- COPROEXNIC, with our help, exported 4 containers of sesame, half organic… 176,000 pounds.
- Together, we exported 22 containers of organic peanuts… 959,062 pounds!
- Together, we exported 38,250 pounds of organic coffee to two buyers. The 2013 coffee crop was not up to its usual high standards and the co-op is taking steps to be more careful in order to keep their coffee first class.
- We hosted different groups of buyers from Once Again Nut Butter, Their-Bucks Coffee, and Maggie’s Organics. They come to negotiate face-to-face with the growers. Lloyd from OANB has been in and out of Nicaragua helping us deal with getting the sesame plant running.
- Becca went to Portland, OR, to participate in a sustainable textiles conference in order to get support for a cotton seed integrity program, which in turn would protect our small cotton farmers.
- In the Nueva Vida Health Clinic, we treated 10,071 patients… 13% were new patients. These patients were seen by three part-time physicians, a full-time radiologist, and volunteer physicians.
- 77% of the pediatrician’s patients were 5 years or younger and of those children 30% were treated for asthma.
- We were donated a non-portable ultrasound machine which complements our portable ultrasound machine. To protect the machinery, the exam room was remodeled and air-conditioned. Our radiologist performed 818 ultrasound exams in 2014.
- We also obtained a new EKG machine from a cardiologist who volunteered one week with a Rotary Club. We have done 263 tests since April.
- We hired the clinic’s volunteer orthopedist when he could no longer volunteer with us. Of the above patients in the clinic, he treated 1,848 patients while working three mornings a week.
- We gave out treatment and medicines for 17,254 conditions and diseases… an increase of 104%!
- We surveyed the Nueva Vida barrio of 12,000 on the prevalence of PAP tests. We started offering free PAPs to stem the high rate of mortality due to cervical cancer. We have equipment to offer cryotherapy but do not have the Ministry of Health’s permission to use it without a licensed gynecologist.

But they are wrong… we are wrong… poverty is caused by injustice. 80 individuals in the world own more than the poorest half of the world’s population. 80 people own more of the world’s wealth than more than three-and-a-half billion people! 80 people!

People are poor because too many of us have way too much and we want to keep it all.

And this, my brothers and sisters, THIS has nothing to do with the grace of God… this is wrong… flat out wrong.

It is wrong that more than 15 million people worldwide, including children, paw through dangerous, toxic city dumps to eke out $1 a day. 15 million going through the muck and filth left from those who have enough to create garbage. This is not moral. This is shameful.

It is wrong that 1 billion people (1/7th of the world’s population) live in extreme poverty; meaning they live on less than $1.00 a day. This is not justice. This is mean and evil.

It is wrong that in this world of plenty, 2.6 million children die each year due to hunger-related causes and 1/8th of the world suffers from chronic malnutrition. This is not grace. This is sin… the most horrific kind.

Poverty is bred in places where injustices reign. Poverty traps people and tortures people and does not let them go. When you hear some pompous pundit/preacher/neighbor say they pulled themselves up by their own boot straps they are lying…

No one gets out of severe poverty on their own… no one… there has to be some catalyst or some smidgen of a just environment to get out.

And in this world of pain, war, terror, pandemics, seas rising, storms raging, droughts, we need each other… every single one of us lives on this spinning ball flying through space and we need each other… this is where we find grace and where we find the courage to work for justice… and for the end of poverty.

-Kathleen
- Our chronic care program grew to 147 patients including 30 elderly patients. They come for monthly check-ups, medications, and monthly meetings to learn about diet, exercise, taking the medications properly and giving each other support. Most have type 2 diabetes but we also have hypertensive patients and patients with Parkinson’s and thyroid issues.

- Pat, our part-time counselor, saw 264 clients… 43% were from the ages of 6 to 12 years. 28% of the problems presented were family problems and 22% were learning disabilities including ADHD.

- Our laboratory completed 10,244 tests in the clinic for 1,902 patients which is a 325% increase (more than 25% referred from other clinics) and we did approximately 2,000 additional tests outside the lab. We sent out 394 PAP tests to be read by a pathologist. We added HIV rapid tests as well as the blood tests. With designat-ed money and a donated microscope, we were able to update some of the lab’s equipment.

- We continued our program with ORPHANetwork to see 1,200 children twice a year in our dental clinic.

- Our full-time dentist, dental hygienist, dental assistant, and volunteer dental professionals saw 3,941 patients (50% more than last year and 49% were under the age of 12 years). They performed 7,029 procedures which is an increase of 160%! Of those procedures, 56% were preventive care [cleanings and sealants]; 24% were restorative care [fillings] and only 11% were extractions…this is amazing for Nicaragua!

- Our dental staff continues to teach patients on the importance of good oral hygiene. They also gave 42 classes to 3,508 children in feeding centers (this more than doubled the number of children and classes from 2013).

- Our one-morning-a-week eye correction clinic saw 310 patients and gave out 477 pairs of glasses. A volunteer optometrist helped for one week and taught as how to be more efficient.

- Our family planning program offered free, consistent birth control for 133 women and 2 men.

- Our community outreach and health education included the following:
  - Continued the new mother’s group and included classes on pregnancy, labor and birth as well as family planning; started a group of mothers of 0-1 year babies; started a group of mother’s with toddlers; and started a group of pre-teen and teen girls to give options for the future other than being a teen mother.
  - Increased our lay health promoters from 32-37 in Nueva Vida and 3 rural communities.
  - Maintained the nebulizers and first aid kits in the homes of lay health promoters.
  - Held 129 different health trainings on 30 different topics of diabetes, sexual health, family planning, etc. for 2,019 participants (this is over twice as many trainings, and almost twice as many participants, than last year!)

- We hosted 15 delegations that stayed from 5 – 20 days each.

- We hosted 46 volunteer medical, dental, and public health professionals in the clinic.

- Four speaking tours encompassed Ireland and 16 states in the U.S. for 109 speaking engagements.

- We hosted 22 groups from other organizations based in Nicaragua, speaking about and showing them our work.

- We hosted 15 individual volunteers from a week to a year.

- We ended the suit against Jack Coker when we received a check for $20,000 from his lawyer (http://jhc-cdca.blogspot.com/2010/05/update-genesis-spinning-co-op.html). He declared bankruptcy. We are still in legal battle with Yelba Car-vajal who is still trying to take the CDCA’s property (http://jhc-cdca.blogspot.com/2014/05/send-lawyers-computers-money.html).

- Once each quarter we sent out over 12,700 newsletters with more than 53% going by email. In December we changed our newsletter email provider because people were not receiving the email.

- We received a matching gift for all the donations in May…totaling over $127,992.76!

- Our on-line donations increased by 63%! In trying to make it easier, we also updated our on-line donation location to take less of a percentage and to provide an emailed note from us with donation receipts, and we obtained a QR Code to make it easier to donate. NOTE: Your gifts are extremely important! More than three-fourths of our cash donations are $100 or less.

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