Land. Hope. Life.

**Empowered One Egg at a Time: Juana Gaspar**

Agros partner Juana Gaspar grew up in a poor household—her home had a palm leaf roof, a dirt floor, and a fire for cooking. No one in her family wore shoes—not even her father who made his living with a machete. It was a rough start, but Juana is not letting that slow her down.

Now, Juana lives in the Agros village of La Providencia, Guatemala. Her family farms several acres of cardamom and coffee. With farming income, she and her husband have sent all 10 of their children to school. Two of Juana’s kids are nurses, one is a teacher, and one will be an agricultural engineer.

Juana’s home today is very different from that of her childhood. She has a metal roof, a cement floor, an enclosed eco-store, a flushing toilet, and running water. This infrastructure was provided in part by Agros and its supporters, but Juana and her family provided the hard labor that made it possible.

And, Juana is not done yet. Her primary goal is to pay off her family’s land debt. She is so focused on her goal that she is taking on extra work to achieve it. In addition to taking care of her family, Juana raises pigs and chickens. She says, “Agros taught us how to take care of the chickens. How to give vaccinations, vitamins, and antibiotics. We know a lot because of Agros.” She likes to keep the chickens close to the house, so she can tend her kids, grandkids, and hens all at once.

Thanks to the work you support, Juana has made a huge difference in the lives of her children, and she feels empowered to continue growing. She is such a shrewd and strong leader in her family, it seems certain that it will not be long before she has her land paid off!

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**Nicaragua in Turmoil**

Nicaragua erupted in civil protests in April 2018 when the government tried to raise taxes and cut retirement. The measure was quickly withdrawn, but protests broadened into demands for President Daniel Ortega to resign. The government responded harshly to the protests—over 300 people were killed and 50,000 fled the country.

The instability has had massive economic implications for what was already the second poorest country in the Western hemisphere. According to World Bank figures, 350,000 jobs were lost and the economy contracted four percent.

Now, however, the costs of food and imported goods like fuel and medicine are rising. Prices for farm goods, and thus incomes, have dropped. Despite the turmoil, Agros is committed to the families we serve. While our strategies may change, the goal is the same: to help farming families break the cycle of poverty in rural Latin America.

As this was written in early 2019, the Nicaraguan government approved a new plan to increase taxes and cut retirement benefits. Experts do not expect massive protests again; however, they do expect the recession to continue.

What does this mean for Agros families? Agros villages are far from the primary conflict, but still face its repercussions. At times it is unsafe to leave the villages, and it is difficult to access healthcare, markets, and other services. Additionally, prices for farm goods, and thus incomes, have dropped.

Finally, we are hosting health fairs for Agros families—and their neighbors. These fairs give families access to vaccines, ultrasounds, bloodwork, prescriptions, and other medical services.

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Inspired by the teachings of Jesus, Agros International breaks the cycle of poverty and creates paths to prosperity for farming families in rural Latin America.
Hot peppers!
How peppers mean profit for farmers

Just a few years ago, Agros farmers in San Jose, Nicaragua, would grow small gardens with a mix of vegetables. They had to buy seedlings to grow specialty crops like peppers, and trying both to grow the vegetables and market them was more than a single farmer could handle. Thus, farmers were stuck selling produce to a middleman for low prices. Seeing these frustrated farmers inspired our agronomists to find ways to improve profits for farmers. For example, we have helped farmers in San Jose specialize in peppers (eight varieties) to which we have also helped them add value.

First, Agros farmers and techs work together to sprout pepper plants in greenhouses. Before, farmers bought seedlings that were often diseased from other providers. After about 15 days, the Agros-grown seedlings are replanted. In three months, they grow to full maturity and begin producing peppers. Without Agros' help, farmers usually grew plants that produced for only 90 days. Now, Agros farmers are growing plants that produce for up to 180 days—and those harvests are coming more frequently. Overall, Agros farmers have moved from having about two harvests a year to having up to five.

The middlemen also used to transport crops to market. Agros now has our own refrigerated truck. This means that after Agros farmers harvest their peppers, they combine them into a large truckload and deliver them to market at once. When farmers control more of the peppers’ movement from field to store, they earn more overall. These changes translate to profit and opportunity for pepper farmers. Take Norlan, for example. When he started growing peppers with Agros, he went from earning $2,000 a year to earning $4,000 for a single pepper harvest. That’s a big win as we work to build profits for farmers!

After harvesting, Agros farmers used to sell their peppers to middlemen at low prices. They were not guaranteed a price—before they even plant them.

One farmer went from earning $2,000 a year to earning $4,000 for a single pepper harvest.

Vision Trips!
Travel with Agros and see hope in action

Meet the farming families Agros serves. Experience life in rural Latin America. Learn how we are breaking the cycle of poverty. Be inspired to help make it all happen! Opportunities to travel with Agros this year include:

- **Guatemala** June 23 - 29
- **Honduras** November 3 - 9

For more information, contact Guillerimo Jiménez at 206.686.3544 or guillerimo@agros.org.

Since Agros was founded in 1984, education has been a critical piece of our health & well-being programs. By ensuring Agros villages have access to well-built, well-staffed elementary schools, we give children an opportunity their parents never had: the chance to complete six years of school in countries where the average person might only complete 4.5 years of school. Ninety-five percent of the kids in Agros villages attend school regularly.

Access is the foundation of our education work, but a few years ago we wanted to do more. After some research, we realized that we could most efficiently impact the children of the rural farming families we serve by instituting early childhood education. By contrast, a focus on secondary education would have reached less than half of high school age kids. We are thrilled to say that our early childhood education program is nearing full implementation.

In 2014, *Science Magazine* published strong new evidence that suggests early childhood education will help children in developing countries overcome barriers to success. The long-term study looked at a hundred toddlers who received weekly visits from community health workers over a two-year period. Each visit included a play session designed to develop cognitive, language, and psychosocial skills. The health workers also taught the adults parenting skills.

As the toddlers grew, they were compared to a control group that did not receive stimulation. The children in the stimulation group improved their reading abilities, were 50 percent less likely to drop out, and attended more years of school overall. Twenty years later, the stimulation group earned about 25 percent more than the control group.

This winter Agros certified nine people—four Agros staff members and five community members—to teach Agros parents positive parenting skills as well as games and activities to help their children fully develop. In essence, they are the “community health workers” of the study described above. These trained individuals will accompany families in Tierra Nueva, Nicaragua with children from zero to five years old. Soon we hope to accompany families in Tierra Nueva, Nicaragua, with this program. While the program is still in its infancy (pun intended!), we look forward to seeing long-term outcomes in the years ahead!