

Valle Nuevo Land Project 1992 – 2009

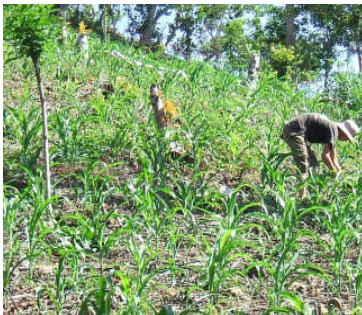


Final Report

Dear Friends,

Many of you have supported land purchase and titling in the community of Valle Nuevo, Cabañas, El Salvador since 1992. This is our final report of CoCoDA's cooperation in the Valle Nuevo Land Project.

We include a recent report by Vilma Recinos, a resident of Valle Nuevo, long-time reporter with Radio Victoria and journalism student at the Jesuit Central American University (UCA). As she reports, Valle Nuevo is now working on the parceling of its



agricultural lands and anticipates transferring titles to 172 families in 2010.

Shalom Mission Communities, a U.S. network of faith-based communities, is raising money to support Valle Nuevo in this final push. For more information on their effort, you can contact Anali Gatlin at anali.gatlin@gmail.com.

Overview of CoCoDA's Cooperation

CoCoDA's cooperation over the past 17 years can be summed up in three phases:

Phase I (1992-1998) involved funding the purchase of the *El Picacho* property, with a major commitment from Reba Place and Plow Creek Fellowships in Illinois, as well as from the St. James Catholic Church in Ferndale, Michigan; the Dumbarton United Methodist Church in Washington, DC; the Church of the Brethren Latin America / Caribbean Office; the Presbytery of the James in Virginia; funds earned by residents of Valle Nuevo at Plow Creek Farm, and with smaller contributions from other groups and individuals. However, legal complications and political divisions within the community exacerbated by outside influences prevented the secure titling of the property.

Phase II (1999-2003) consisted mostly of consultations with various Salvadoran attorneys and a lengthy series of large and small group discussions with families in Valle Nuevo to determine, in a transparent and democratic way, how to title the property. CoCoDA's role



A general assembly meeting in Valle Nuevo discusses titling issues for community lands.

as an animator and facilitator in this process was strengthened by funding, ideas and moral support from Equity Trust, a non-profit land trust organization based in New England. CoCoDA and Equity Trust advocated keeping the lands as a community holding, but Valle Nuevo families overwhelmingly decided to parcel the community lands, to then title in the names of individual families.

Phase III (2003-2009) was devoted to supporting Valle Nuevo with funding and technical support to complete survey and legal work necessary to title and register all of their lands in the National Registry (some had outdated, informal or conflicting legal documents). This encompassed a total of 11 properties, including *El Picacho*.

The *Fundación REDES* provided affordable technical expertise and labor to accomplish this immense, time-consuming job. The perimeters of all properties were re-measured with modern GPS equipment, as were all lots where Valle Nuevo homes are located. The parceling of agricultural land was not included in REDES' services. A number of groups and individuals who have hung in with this project over the years helped raise funds for this phase.



Engineers from the REDES Foundation survey Valle Nuevo land with GPS equipment.

As Vilma reports, the community of Valle Nuevo, their attorney and a surveyor appear to be close to issuing land titles to families, with support from Shalom Mission Communities. All of you who contributed at one time or another, or several times, over the past 17 years, have helped to make this moment possible for Valle Nuevo families – securing their rights as landowners, doing so in a manner they themselves chose as the best option for their future.

-- Tim Crouse, CoCoDA Coordinator, Valle Nuevo Land Project

Financial Report – Valle Nuevo Land Project 1992-2009

INCOME

Reba Place & Plow Creek Fellowship – Payment #1 to Valle Nuevo	\$ 34,000
<u>Contributions to CoCoDA</u>	<u>\$ 66,206</u>
TOTAL INCOME	\$100,206

EXPENSES

Phase I: 1992-98

First payment to former land owners, funds raised by Reba Place and Plow Creek Fellowships, sent directly to Valle Nuevo leadership	\$34,000
Second payment to former land owners, paid by CoCoDA with financing from the Church of the Brethren Employees' Credit Union	\$16,100
Legal and technical expenses 1994-98	\$ 7,800
Interest on Brethren Credit Union Loan	\$ 5,991
Valle Nuevo Community Fund for logistics, mobilizing, etc.	\$ 1,650
Asociación de Desarrollo Económico y Social, Santa Marta (ADES) – Legal Costs	\$ 500
CoCoDA Coordination and Administration	\$ 2,810
Sub-Total Phase I	\$68,851

Phase II: 1999-2003

Perimeter GPS measurement of Picacho by Fundación REDES, survey evaluation	\$ 4,116
Community organizing, assembly discussions, consultants, legal counsel, etc.	\$ 7,018
CoCoDA Coordination and Administration	\$ 1,075
Sub-Total Phase II	\$12,209

Phase III: 2003-2009

Legal fees and taxes – National Registry	\$ 2,595
Attorney fees	\$ 2,405
GPS perimeter measurements of all Valle Nuevo properties	\$ 6,216
Logistics for Valle Nuevo Leadership, facilitators, etc.	\$ 162
Contribution to Shalom Mission Communities for agricultural lots / legal costs	\$ 2,500
CoCoDA coordination and administration	\$ 5,268
Sub-Total Phase III	\$19,146

TOTAL EXPENSES

\$100,206

The Measurement of Lands in Valle Nuevo

By Vilma Patricia Laínez
December, 2009

Edited and translated to English by Tim Crouse, CoCoDA. The original report in Spanish is available by request from cocodaindy@igc.org.

The measuring of land in the Community of Valle Nuevo is almost completed. The attorney guiding the process, Adolfo Ramos, says that between the 10th and 20th of January, 2010, the 11 properties will be accepted in the National Registry, a process already underway. Once the titles of the 11 properties are issued, the 11 properties will be unified into one property under one title. This process, according to Mr. Ramos, will be completed by January 25, 2010.

The allocation of agricultural lots to beneficiaries will begin in April, 2010. Mr. Ramos assures that apart from the titling of the 11 properties, work is also advancing in what the *directiva* (community council) calls the mapping of each lot (or parcel).

In fact, there is a written contract that states that the whole process should be concluded within five months. This contract is a written commitment that states that the surveyor responsible for measuring lots will have to assume the costs if he goes past the deadline. His commitment is to complete the job in its entirety.

Directiva (Community Council)

The president of the Valle Nuevo *directiva*, María Tomasa Torres, oversees the process. She affirms that they have overcome the obstacles to completing the work of measuring the land. She was referring to the obstacle of covering the cost of each parcel. It has been agreed that each beneficiary pay 70 dollars for their lot. The beneficiaries have accepted this in a General Assembly. They have begun turning in their money (the number who have paid is not available at this time). Tomasa Torres affirmed that it was agreed to exonerate three families considering the conditions of poverty in which they live. The exonerated families are those of Carmen Torres, María Rodas (the name of the other is pending).

Beneficiaries

The beneficiaries trust that the process of distributing the land will proceed step by step. For this report Margarita Avilés, Eduarda Rivera and Olivia Dubón were interviewed.

They said they were aware of the process. They were told that everything is settled and only interviews with beneficiary families remained to be done. "They already measured the parcels, now they only need to give each one (family) a number, to see which parcel they will get," said María Avilés. The raffle is the best method for

distributing the lots according to the beneficiaries. “The people will have to recognize the number they draw, and can’t say; ‘They gave me the worst one.’ It’s luck,” said Avilés. The families believe that each beneficiary – if it is one family – will get more than one *manzana* (1.7 acres), and if they are two families, more than two *manzanas*.

The process is not well viewed in its totality by all the beneficiaries. In the case of Eduarda Rivera, they only assigned her one parcel, even though she has seven members in her family. Eduarda already paid for her first parcel and believes she has the right to another because her family is larger than six members. But, the requirement for a family to be beneficiary of an agricultural parcel is that they live in Valle Nuevo, this is the position of the *directiva*. In the case of Eduarda Rivera, her older kids live in the capital, they are already married and only come to visit her. Also, one of her sons was murdered at the beginning of this year. The kids who live in the capital returned from the refugee camp with their mother and this, according to Eduarda Rivera, give her the right to demand another parcel.

Eduarda also complains that she has to pay for her parcel. She is poor, her economic conditions do not permit her to pay, yet she already paid for her lot. Regarding the process, she expressed doubts about how it was being carried out, “I have a question, how come they (the *directiva*) have not come by measuring the lots? I don’t know if they have measured them all. They don’t explain anything to us. They don’t convene assemblies to explain what’s going on to the people. They (*the directiva*) are just there on their own doing their thing,” says Eduarda Rivera. But the *directiva* president Tomasa Torres says that the entire process has been explained to the beneficiaries. “The problem is that some come to the assemblies and don’t pay attention, or sometimes don’t attend when they are convened,” says Torres. She argues the process has been transparent.

Olivia Dubón, another beneficiary, considers the measurement work has been excellent. “It is what all the community of Valle Nuevo wants, that one day we all will be owners of a piece of land. Because the way we are now, some grab more than others, so maybe now it will be more equal,” says Mrs. Dubón, affirming that a raffle is the best method for distributing the land. Olivia says that she is clear about the whole process, “Now I think that only the raffle is remaining.” Mrs. Dubón is aware that each beneficiary has to support the process with a sum of money as their collaboration.

In the process of distributing the lands are four families who returned in the final repatriation from the refugee camps (several years after Valle Nuevo repatriated). Tomasa Torres says that the decision was made by the community to include them. These families are José Nieves Torres, Jacinto Rivas, Mirna Alfaro and Amparo Alvarenga.

In total, one hundred seventy-two families will benefit from the distribution of agricultural lots. Families of six or less will get one lot and families of seven or more will get two. This is the agreement that was reached with the residents of Valle Nuevo. For distributing the lots it is agreed that a raffle will be the means. The process will take place in a general assembly. In this assembly, each family will draw a number that will correspond to the measured lot. Another agreement, according to the *directiva*, is

that for each lot there will be two representatives of the family named, to avoid a quick selling of the land once the title is received.

Sources:

Adolfo Ramos – attorney

Tomasa Torres – president of the *directiva* of Valle Nuevo

Beneficiaries - Margarita Avilés; Eduarda Rivera; Olivia Dubón

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