



Post Fellowship Reporting - Project Summary

Report Title: Sustainable living and education: Greening our future from Costa Rica and Panama
Name: Nilam Trivedi

Other Team Members:

Program: Atlanta Program
Trip Dates: 11/30/-0001 - 11/30/-0001
Location Visited: Costa Rica and Panama

Post Fellowship Reporting Template: PFR Template 02

Project Summary: In order to broaden my scope of sustainable agriculture and energy efficiency, I traveled to Costa Rica and Panama for three weeks. Throughout this journey I volunteered with and visited two models of sustainable education, La Gran Finca and Punta Mona -- both of which exhibit best practices in sustainable living and education. La Gran Finca was created to educate and inspire based on the principle of minimal human impact. As a volunteer for ten days, I immersed myself on the organic farm, educating myself on the ways in which they utilized their earth, taking only what they needed and returning what they took in various nutrient rich forms. The farm kitchen ran on methane gas gathered from the two pigs they raised. Using a biogas converter, the waste excreted from the pigs was processed and the methane gas line sent directly to the burners in the kitchen. Residents also raise their own fish in a pond constructed by another educational group. I created fertilizer from horse manure and watched as the earth's natural decomposers, worms, converted this into nutrient rich fertilizer for raised beds. All of the vegetables used in farm cooking are grown on the farm using no pesticides, rather natural plant deterrents around the perimeter of the garden.

Through extensive education of the surrounding community, La Gran Finca provides direct assistance to those wanting to create environmental sustainability in their own lives. I assisted in lectures and demonstrations given to women's groups that are building a greenhouse using sustainable construction materials such as bamboo, old tires and discarded milk jugs.

I took away from my fellowship a sense of empowerment through something as simple as waking outside and pulling the fruits and vegetables needed for the day's meal. I realized the importance of educating the students in my school on incorporating local foods into their diet on a daily basis, taking charge of their lives and growing their own foods; thereby, relinquishing dependence on municipal sources of water and electricity. It was an eye opening experience, one that will pervade my classroom, the intracurricular units of study, and the mentality of the minds of my students. After my experience on the organic educational farm and Punta Mona I know that my role as an educator is to cultivate and educate the next group of green citizens that will act as ambassadors of environmental conservation and healthy living.

Career Impact: As a person with little to no farming or sustainable education experience, I was nervous I wouldn't ask the right questions or contribute effectively. After arriving on the farm, however I was welcomed with open arms by owners Xinia and Donald. They immediately brought me in as part of the family as I began calling them 'Tia' and 'Tio' (Spanish for 'aunt' and 'uncle.') Along with energy efficiency and botany lessons associated with daily life on the farm, they showed me true Costa Rican culture.

La Gran Finca is perched atop the mountain, with the wind blowing throughout the night. It is a place I went for an organic education but I also found myself harboring a sense of inner peace. I challenged myself to bring a small group of students here to experience this unique farm. Xinia would always say "Cada cosa tiene un otro destino" which means, "Everything has another purpose." Xinia's saying resonated with me on many levels, as a citizen, an educator, and a responsible adult. I will campaign for all the principles I learned on the farm, simple and pure living makes for fewer hiccups along the way.

Classroom/Community Impact: The effect on the school and community will be immediate as I begin to implement my action plan. The entire community, including parents will participate in the building, planting and maintenance of a school garden. Students will harvest fruits and vegetables and utilize the healthy living curriculum to educate their family on the importance of healthy eating. Students will learn ways to incorporate environmental stewardship in the classroom, their lives and their own homes. A entire community will come together to increase recycling, brainstorm ways to reuse old goods and implement energy audits to truly understand the amount of energy waste occurring in their homes. Our students will create a farm- to-school lunch program using produce from local farms and the school garden. At the end of the school year, our students will complete a project including all disciplines on sustainable development. They will research and choose a topic including collecting and interpreting data, success stories and probability for implementation into our community. This journey galvanized an inspiration to empower youth to take care of our earth and leave a minimal amount behind.

Open Response: After participating in more workshops and volunteering on farms in Atlanta, I will educate the staff on energy efficiency, the importance of supporting local farms, and urban gardening. Subsequently, I will offer project-based vignettes on sustainable development that teachers can incorporate into their classroom lessons. Students will learn how to garden, and will learn about proper nutrition, energy conservation and the history of recycling. The project will carry on throughout the school year as students take charge and complete projects based on their research of sustainable projects around the world. We will make energy efficient stoves, solar powered ovens and our own compost. A long- term goal will be to bring a small group of students back to La Gran Finca to complete another project and see ways in which people can truly live off the land with little to no dependence on large superstores, malls, and online networks.

Quote: It is our responsibility to educate our youth in the name of environmental conservation;growing and sourcing local food is the first step.

Photos:



Pulling beans from the organic coffee plant.



Separating the worms from the fertilizer.



Daily morning milking of the cow.



Picking the day's vegetables.



Construction of community greenhouse



Visiting the Del Monte pineapple farm.



Planting for the raised beds.



Simple Living.