



With the help of SHARE, Sister Ellen provides basic food needs to rural communities in NE Brazil.

HUGH BEATY

FARMERS IN POVERTY: The other side of Brazilian agriculture

BY LAURIE WEBER

Overwhelming poverty remains rampant in rural areas of Brazil, and basic food needs are not being met. In these poor areas, particularly the drought prone northeast, SHARE helps small farmers and entrepreneurs start micro enterprises by providing loans and training to a variety of small agricultural initiatives.

Brazil is mired in poverty. The United Nations indicates Brazil has the widest gap between the wealthy and poor, compared to 37 other countries at similar levels of development. With 66 per cent of Brazil's rural population below the poverty line, these small farmers will never compete with North America agriculture—these are not the mammoth Brazilian plantations making headlines because of their scale

and volume. Rather, these are farmers who just want to feed their families and generate a small income.

Everyday life is difficult for rural communities. Being geographically isolated, marketing opportunities are small and there is little support for innovative ideas. Villagers who want to start a small business

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often can't read or write to apply for a loan. And with other obstacles such as no collateral and interest rates exceeding 25 per cent, it's impossible to borrow start-up capital.

About 10 years ago, SHARE started funding micro-credit—that is providing small loans for the poor in Brazil. Hundreds of small farmers in four states have benefited from the loans, for organic fruit, vegetable or small livestock projects.

Along with loans, entrepreneurs also need training in the business aspects of new ventures. SHARE finances organic producers' meetings where farmers come together for a few days to learn new skills from shared experiences. For example, nearly 100 people from four states participated in the 2005 Organic Growers

Meeting in March in Pernambuco, where host communities demonstrated new production and marketing techniques.

SHARE also provides courses in leadership training, conflict resolution, planning and financial management through the Germinar courses facilitated by Ricardo Javier Reigosa, SHARE's Brazilian co-ordinator. Graduates return home to pass on the knowledge and techniques learned through participative sessions.

Leadership is a vital part of a successful project. When SHARE's project committee receives a proposal, solid local leadership is one of the criteria examined. Successful micro enterprises offer increased economic self sufficiency through better food production, value-added marketing of agricultural products, and diversified diets. They also form the foundation of a future of hope for the less fortunate.

They found land: endless drive and marginal earth

BY BOB THOMAS

Despite a difficult past, there's no resentment in his voice. No regrets.

Instead, 35-year-old Artemio exudes optimistic enthusiasm from his friendly smile, as he explains plans for his community. It has a new life, having finally found land to call its own.

As a youth, Artemio saw no future for himself on his tenant father's one-acre property. So, he joined the landless movement in Brazil known as Movimento Sem Terra (www.mst.com.br) to try to obtain a small plot of land to call his own.

With limited opportunity for education during decades of military dictatorship—but with an abundance of ambition—Artemio, like six million other landless campesinos in Brazil, tried to peacefully pressure the federal government to enforce the land reform program, whereby bankrupt and abandoned rural properties can be purchased by the government and allocated to families seeking land to feed their families. But, their efforts are often thwarted by the status quo of wealthy Brazilians, backed by military police.

Camped at roadsides under crude plastic tents, Artemio and the other



PHOTO BY BOB THOMAS

Artemio in a research plot of organic corn.

families were sprayed with tear gas and forced to move four times before finally achieving legal rights to marginal land near Candiota in Rio Grande do Sul state.

"At first we tried to grow grains in this area which previously grew rice, but it was a failure," says Artemio.

With some support from SHARE and other NGOs, the group successfully started growing organic vegetables. Good vegetables produce good seeds, and the group has been able to expand into selling organic vegetable seeds. Now, it's planning to build a training and research centre in the area.

With strong partners like Artemio, SHARE's pass-on principle is a "hand up" in action.

TRAINING IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS

BY RICARDO JAVIER REIGOSA
Project coordinator (Brazil)

I constantly witness the agricultural contrasts in Brazil. At one extreme are large, modern, progressive agribusinesses exporting soybeans, sugar, ethanol, oranges, poultry and beef.

At the other end of the spectrum are the small family farmers who question: "How can I get technical information? Where can I obtain credit?", "How can I transport and market my fruits and vegetables in the city?", "How can my children achieve a better education?", and many times "What are we going to eat tonight?"

Recognizing this vast disparity, Brazil has created the Ministry of Agriculture for the mega farms, and the Ministry of Agrarian Development dealing with small farmers' issues, including land reform.

In my work with small farmers, I repeatedly encounter a lack of group skills, such as the inability to conduct an organized meeting, arriving at consensual decisions, conflict resolution, and even listening skills, perhaps because many never had access to education.

During the last few years, I have seen SHARE focusing more on a total approach to transform small farmers towards sustainable control over their own destiny. For example, in Bahia, SHARE supports two technicians who advise more than 400 small farmers on improving their production. In Rio Grande do Sul state, a remote ecological training/research centre for assentados (formerly landless farmers) is supported by SHARE.

Success hinges on small farmers working together, over an extended period of time. This is why SHARE invests in group skills training. By investing in human development and education, SHARE is making long term commitments towards sustainable transformation. It's the right approach.

Milk for Over 5,000: It all began with the Beatys

By JEANINE WALLACE

Many farmers look forward to their late 50s as a time to slow down...but not Hugh Beaty. When this Milton-area dairy farmer and his late wife Melba approached that milestone, they decided to do something different, to leave their mark, to help humanity. And that's when they got involved with SHARE.

In 1977, the duo embarked on an adventure that would change the course of their lives, and of many others. Their destination was the North-East Brazilian community of Mossoro. Their plan was to take high-quality Canadian herd stock to Mossoro and over a two-year period, immerse themselves into the community, helping to develop a new herd with the Canadian animals. At the same time, they would help with nutrition in the impoverished region, with better milk production.

Their commitment was unwavering. To support their journey, they sold their cattle and equipment, and rallied the support of other dairy farmers in Southern Ontario to donate animals. After a few months of solicitation, SHARE had assembled a herd of 41 heifers (including one that belonged to the Beatys) and two bulls.

So with their plane full of Canadian cattle, they left comfortable southern Ontario and arrived in Mossoro to find anything but a tropical paradise. The Beaty's new home was a small cement building situated just outside of town. Their water supply was a rain supplied cistern that produced limited, unreliable and often contaminated water. But they



Hugh Beaty and past chair Hume Porteous visiting a poor family in Mossoro, NE Brazil. The cart the father uses to go to work had a flat tire, and therefore the food money for that day went towards repairs.

soldiered on, with their eye on the goal.

The cattle were unloaded and housed at the University of Mossoro. Hugh Beaty was responsible for managing the herd and distributing the milk. But it wasn't easy, right from the start. In fact, vaccinating the new herd from ticks, a common enemy to cattle, was one of their greatest hurdles. The process was lengthy because the animals had to wait three months after vaccination before they could be bred.

It soon became clear that the local farmers needed more skills to care for these new animals. Surplus bull calves and select females were auctioned, and the proceeds from the sales were used to purchase needs for the local poor community. Milk from the herd was sold, raising enough money to feed the herd.

During the second year of the project, the sale of some offspring continued, but instead of selling the milk, it was donated to Sister Ellen, a German nun who fed and educated street kids and poor children in Mossoro. Sister Ellen believed poor children needed an education, and had about 500 youngsters in her school. Over time, poverty in Mossoro has persisted and

the need to educate the poor has grown—today, she teaches over 5,000 children in her 12 schools, and is still receiving milk from the original herd. “The milk my children receive is the most valuable gift ever given,” said Sister Ellen.

Hugh Beaty is proud of the way the project has evolved. “We don't realize how much we have until we see others suffer without,” he says. That realization has kept their interest high. The Beatys returned to Canada after their two year sojourn, but have

made 16 trips back to Mossoro since then, to check on the herd and other projects, and implement new projects to help the community. Upon returning home, Hugh Beaty became the Executive Director for SHARE, retiring in 1991, however he still maintains an active interest in the SHARE program.

Jeanine Wallace is a student writer in Owen Roberts's agricultural communication program at the University of Guelph.



Interested in
learning more
about SHARE?

Consider joining a
monitoring trip.

CONTACT:

PROJECT OFFICERS

Les Frayne margfrayne@hotmail.com

Bob Thomas rwthomas@sympatico.ca



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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Many of SHARE's projects have been made possible by matching donations from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). CIDA has reviewed its funding criteria to conform to new federal government foreign aid policies, and the new plan doesn't include support for projects like ours in Brazil.

Quite simply, without CIDA's \$2 contribution for every \$1 we raise in donations, our ability to help the less fortunate is being drastically reduced.

We need your help. We have a number of on-going projects throughout Brazil which are highly effective in achieving sustainable results. But we don't have the finances required to keep the momentum going. One of these projects is micro-

enterprise. Our cover story describes how difficult it is for poor people to better their lives through private initiatives and access to micro-credit. In the state of Rio Grande do Sul, SHARE has loaned funds to small farmers since 1995. The revolving fund now has reached approximately \$40,000. It's administered by a diocese and farmer committee and no longer requires grants from SHARE. It's hard to believe, but there hasn't been a single default on a loan! It's also rewarding to witness the pride local people take in seeing this fund grow through fundraising events, suppers and festas that they organize.

SHARE's programs are proven, and we have a great momentum going. It's important that it not only be maintained, but continued and expanded. SHARE is fortunate that our investment is growing and working so well. The 'pass on' continues, as loans are paid back and then more families are able to join the revolving fund.

We would like to help an additional 500 families who are in need, but we're restricted by finances. Our goal is to raise \$50,000 for new loans. Please consider making a tax-deductible donation toward the micro-credit funds and help people to help themselves.

2006 SHARE EVENTS

January 21

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

1:15 pm
Mayfield United Church
12496 Dixie Road
Mayfield, ON
(North of Mayfield Rd.)

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EDITORS:

Hume Porteous, 519.824.0799
hume.porteous@sympatico.ca
Laurie Weber, 905.877.1360
lweber2@hotmail.com

EDITORIAL COORDINATOR: Owen Roberts

DESIGNER: Stephanie Howarth

PRIVACY POLICY:

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Satisfied customers at the Annual Sharing Hands Ladies Plant sale in June. Over \$1,100 was raised for SHARE.

HELP FOR EL SALVADOR

El Salvador has seen its share of natural disasters in the past month. Hurricane Stan, an earthquake and a volcano eruption have all left many people homeless. Mudslides, poor water quality and unsanitary living conditions have caused widespread displacement of people. SHARE has provided \$5,000 emergency aid to help these rural people with basic needs.