Agricultural students from the University of Guelph added a new twist to their Reading Week break this year. Through a partnership with SHARE, they embarked on a week-long study tour to Belize. The experience was, for most, their first perspective of life in a developing country.

The group of seven students was supervised by Guelph agricultural communications instructor Owen Roberts, and led by Les Frayne, SHARE project officer. Their Belizean experience offered a look at new cultures, terrain, agricultural practices and people. Visits included a sugar cane plant, shrimp farm, meat processing facility, Mennonite communities, traditional Belizean communities, and Mayan ruins.

Throughout the week, many events left a lasting impression on the Guelph group. In particular, students were struck by the different rates of growth within Belize. Some areas were well developed with modern houses, vehicles, furnishings and technology, while other areas struggled to have the basic possessions necessary to live. Clear differences were also found in how Belizeans communicate. In rural areas, where technology access can be limited, government and non-government workers become extension-type agents. Their role, as was seen when visiting the SHARE dairy projects, is to deliver information and resources. Belizeans also put great emphasis on personal communication. Throughout the week it was very evident the role social events play in building a sense of community and belonging.

The Belizean people are hospitable, and shared a tremendous wealth of knowledge with the Guelph group. Typically, tours stretched long past their scheduled end as guides went the extra distance to explain or demonstrate their point. Stark differences were also apparent in the food supply. Top-notch technology was found to play a large role at the Running W slaughter house, Belize’s leading meat processor. During the students’ stop at the slaughter house, they realized how tightly intertwined food safety and the HAACP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points) programs were in Belize food production – much like in Canada. Yet, while some Belizeans have easy access to a top-rate food supply, others are self-reliant on their own subsistence farming enterprises.

In Arenal, a small village near the Guatemalan border, having adequate food available is not always possible. During their visit, the link between proper nutrition and a child’s ability to learn and advance themselves became very apparent to the Guelph group.

SHARE has been supplying dairy cattle and goats to impoverished rural communities, and Mayan ruins.

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Literacy is a building block for success, no matter where you live. In El Salvador, SHARE has recognized this need, and has recently started providing literacy training to people across the country. Literacy training enables these El Salvadorians to have a better chance at life. Literacy means a chance at an entry level job nearby, or starting a little business from home. If even one person from a family is able to bring in a little cash, life changes dramatically for the better.

SHARE started working in El Salvador almost a decade ago with traditional dairy and agricultural projects. SHARE has now branched out into other ways to help the villages, specifically literacy training, technical training, and micro-enterprise projects (aka small business loans).

Success in these micro-enterprise projects is strongly influenced by the basic literacy skills. Can you imagine how difficult it would be to read an invoice or make change without the basic skills in reading writing and arithmetic?

SHARE has a multi-component approach to projects for just that reason. SHARE provides the basic literacy skills, and then follows up with a business opportunity through micro-enterprise loans. The organization gives them the tools to build the skills and the confidence to run a business.

Agricultural projects are SHARE’s base and our strength, but offering other options such as literacy training is how the organization is taking a multi-pronged approach to break the cycle of poverty.

One family that participated in the literacy training has gone on to start a successful business with a micro-enterprise loan. Leslie’s bakery or “Lesly’s Panaderia” in Spanish, pictured here, borrowed $200 to buy a used oven for baking bread. Now the family has a small business producing bread for local distribution. The kids help out after school and this family now has a better chance at life because of your help. SHARE’s integrated approach is improving the standard of living in these communities tremendously.

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communities for 30 years with this in mind.

Scholarship programs, (such as the one SHARE offers), as well as the dairy projects are helping to ensure the nourishment of both mind and body in Belizean students. The Guelph group had the opportunity to spend a day travelling with one such scholarship student named Josue. They were amazed to learn how Josue was working to pay both his way, and his sister’s, through the four years of secondary school system.

Despite the many differences within Belize, and in comparing the country to Canada, similarities were also found. Walking through an evening political rally revealed to the Guelph students that at a country’s core the issues can be the same anywhere in the world. The highest priorities in the Belize election campaign: health care, education and employment, are also among the top focus in Canada.

All would agree that their experiences in Belize have helped shape a different perspective on communication, agriculture, cultures and life itself. More than a Reading Week break trip, this was an opportunity to step outside traditional thinking boundaries and experience new approaches.

Kim Waalderbos, an Ontario Agricultural College student, participated in the SHARE-University of Guelph study tour of Belize.
The pass-on principle – that is, a farmer receiving a cow is expected to give at least one offspring of that cow in return to another needy family – is the foundation for SHARE’s successful cattle projects in El Salvador. With the sizeable base herd that SHARE now has built up, the pass-on approach is expected to double the number of cows in the next couple years.

Over the last decade, eight groups came forward with an interest in participating in a SHARE cattle project. In these villages, 115 families with over 400 children are now being helped by SHARE.

SHARE is based on the principle of a ‘hand-up’ rather than a ‘hand-out’. To be considered for funding, a project must demonstrate sustainability. The focus is to increase a community’s capacity to care for itself. Some 135 animals were purchased, and SHARE is happy to report that the pass-on is now in full swing.

“We were impressed with the level of health and condition of the cattle in the SHARE projects compared with other cattle herds that we passed while travelling around this beautiful and diverse country,” said Paul McLellan, former dairy producer and SHARE director, who visited El Salvador in 2006.

With time and care these groups have begun to repay their debt by passing on the offspring. Four new communities have recently started cattle projects. Over 50 cows, 5 bulls, and 17 calves have been passed on to these new communities. Male animals are generally sold rather than being passed on to other communities.

Buying cattle for these new communities would have easily cost $40,000, but with the pass-on principle, SHARE didn’t have to spend a penny. SHARE’s cattle program will continue to grow in El Salvador with little re-investment.

SHARE is helping to spread the good fortune of owning dairy cattle, and ensures through the pass-on principle that wealth is not being accumulated with just one person. SHARE actively manages the pass-on in order to maximize the number of animals available to other needy groups. It’s amazing that with the projected number of cattle being passed on in the next couple years, that least another six groups can start dairy projects at no cost to you, our donors.
An interview with SHARE director Trudy Blackburn

*Trudy and Harry Blackburn recently returned from a monitoring trip to Belize*

**Q:** What was the most memorable experience on your recent monitoring trip?

**A:** My most memorable event was visiting the family of Maria, a high school student we met while visiting SHARE scholarship recipients in Belmopan. Maria is one of nine children in her family. Her mother and some of the children make baskets and jewellery to sell to raise the funds so that the children can go to school. Being a budding entrepreneur, she suggested that perhaps we could stop at her house and look at the items. On meeting the family, it was obvious the parents value education greatly. The SHARE scholarship helps families such as Maria’s who cannot afford the tuition. This unexpected opportunity was truly a memorable experience.

**Q:** Now that you’ve seen the projects firsthand, what’s your impression on the effectiveness of SHARE’s work?

**A:** Without SHARE’s help, many bright young adults would not be able to attend high school. Education is critical for succeeding in Belize, and with SHARE’s scholarship program, these students will have a better life than their parents. It’s money well spent.

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**May 4**

**COPETOWN FUNDRAISING DINNER**

7pm @ Copetown Community Centre

**June 3**

**PLANT SALE**

9-12pm @ Sharing Hands Ladies Group, 14409 Creditview Rd, Cheltenham

**June 10**

**SHARE CONCERT (**New Event**)**

8pm @ Grace United Church, 156 Main St N, Brampton

**July 17**

**SHARE 7th ANNUAL GOLF TOURNAMENT**

9am @ Ariss Valley Golf and Country Club

**September 10**

**CORN ROAST FOR SCHOLARSHIP FUND**

3.30-8.30 pm @ Harmer Farm, 2395 No 1 Sideroad, Burlington

**November 4**

**SHARE ANNUAL DINNER DANCE**

6:30pm @ Speranza Banquet Hall

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tel: 905-799-1135 or toll free 1-888-337-4273

di: 905-799-2722

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