



Brazilian Volunteers Helping People Help Themselves

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"We're learning and teaching at the same time. We're here to work alongside the people in helping them to help themselves."

These are the words of Donald Ranck, a Mennonite Central Committee volunteer, and they come from Brazil via tape. On the tape, Donald discusses the role of the volunteer, the challenges they hope to meet and some of the problems encountered along the way.

Donald Ranck is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd H. Ranck, Paradise, RD1, and is married to the former Virginia Wivell, daughter of Mrs. Helen Wivell, Columbia, RD1. They have already spent 2½ years working in Brazil, and plan to stay another 1½ years to continue working with MCC projects there. A son, Eldon Antonio, was born to the Rancks on October 29, 1973.

The Rancks went to Brazil as volunteers for alternative service for Donald. They lived in a village for two years and worked alongside the native Brazilians learning customs and the language as they helped. After their two years, MCC asked them to stay on and Donald is now supervisor of the volunteers in Brazil. Donald is a graduate of Pequea Valley High School and Penn State, and Virginia graduated from Donegal High School.

The MCC project in Brazil is located in the state of Pernambuco, which borders on the east coast of Brazil. The state is in the sugar cane zone, a 50 by 150 mile wide belt in the heart of the heavy rainfall zone. The Rancks now live in Recife, which is the easternmost part of Brazil, and is the closest point to the west coast of Africa. Brazil itself is larger than the continental United States, lies south of the equator and is two time zones east of Lancaster.

Donald says that a continuing goal of their program is "to come up with the kind of program in agriculture which actually will be of significant assistance to the subsistence level farmer. We need to provide technical service, but if it is so complicated or cannot be reproduced by someone in the community after we leave, then it won't have the long range effects we desire."

"But," he adds, "Not to introduce new technology means we'll have to move very slowly."

Most of the people with whom the volunteers work are sugar cane workers, but Donald says on the tape, "The development of the sugar cane workers is next to impossible because of the necessity for cheap labor to harvest the sugar cane which produces 80 percent of the state's economic resources." The sugar cane has been grown by plantation owners for over 400 years, and so, according to Donald, "paternalism exists to a great degree." He adds, "It is difficult to overcome the mentality of the people which is largely based on subsistence level farming."

Donald says, "We try to concentrate our efforts on people who recently acquired land, or people who have had land but haven't developed it." One problem, however, is that many



Don Ranck, Jose Alves and Custodio Lin are pictured in Custodio's chicken house examining some eight-week-old hybrid broilers.



Don and Virginia Ranck are shown in their backyard watering their vegetables. In the background are their fertilized banana trees.

of these people have no skill in management, and therefore "don't know the best way to spend their time."

"We are constantly searching for those who have the capacity, the desire and the ability to lead, but we don't seem to be able to predict it." Too often, he says, the "worker-turned-businessman" has a tendency to misuse the power he has acquired and become just as oppressive as the people for whom he worked previously.

He concluded, "the development process is extremely complicated and answers don't come easily. The key in the development process must be an institutional person if the development is to be lasting."

The volunteers have worked with two cooperatives, but it has been necessary for them to spend a great deal of time and

effort developing the supply, service and market infrastructure which could make the co-ops a success. According to Donald, "small production units are always at the mercy of price oscillations no matter how well designed and productive the projects are." He said volunteers strive to make things "work realistically."

One cooperative has been formed to help buy chicken feed and to market broilers and eggs, and volunteers are hoping to establish a continuous supply of their product. Money for the initial investment comes from MCC, and the workers repay it without interest as the work becomes profitable.

One highly successful venture has been a garden project which was organized around a school. School children planted vegetables and attracted the interest of their parents. Subsequently each family was given a plot of land surrounding the school, and they have successfully grown lettuce, cabbage, onions, tomatoes, celery and other garden vegetables.

The Lloyd Rancks who visited with Donald and Virginia in January and observed the projects firsthand discussed one of the big problems facing the volunteers, and that is teaching the people the concept of saving for a rainy day. They explained that the mentality of the people is such that no matter what they have they share it with a friend. They cannot, for instance, save a cabbage for another meal (quite aside from the fact that there is no refrigeration in the villages) because there is always someone who needs the food now.

A very "exciting" development to Donald was being able to interest Mennonite communities in southern Brazil to take an active part in the volunteer project. They now have volunteer trainees from the south who will be working with the natives in ongoing projects. One obvious advantage is the lack of a language barrier and the certain basic understanding which exists among natives of a country.

Another area which is of concern to the volunteers is health. Virginia, a Licensed Practical Nurse, worked with villagers in hygiene and prenatal and postnatal care, and the work which she began is being carried out to some extent by two natives whose small salaries are paid by MCC. But, according to Donald, "Not a single institution is willing to support the program and continue it." He says a significant step will have been taken "when we can withdraw support and know that it will continue." There are existing hospitals and clinics for the natives, but very little is being done in preventive medicine.

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Lloyd H. Ranck points to the corner of Brazil where his son Donald is a volunteer with the Mennonite Central Committee.