

# Lancaster Peace Corp volunteer aids small farmers in Costa Rica

In Costa Rica, where Peace Corps volunteers have served for 13 years, the problem is not winning the confidence of local residents, says volunteer Bradley A. Igou of Lancaster. Instead, it's being sought out for solutions to many more problems than one can solve.

"One must honestly admit that a Peace Corps volunteer is sometimes viewed as a 'special' person, perhaps due to more experiences and chances for development and education in the United States," says Igou.

"More or less current knowledge or thinking there may be very new and interesting here. Thus one feels innovative, that he can change things - change in the sense of presenting other sides or opportunities and letting people decide for themselves.

"In other words, one feels more valuable and needed here."

Igou, 24, is a volunteer agricultural extension agent whose job is to teach improved farming methods to poor, small-scale farmers. Demonstration plots, which the farmers plant under his direction, using seeds, fertilizers and insecticides provided by the agricultural extension office, are his favored teaching tools.

So satisfying is life in Costa Rica that Igou hopes to stay on after his two-year term of Peace Corps service ends in April. He'd like to teach English at an agricultural school and continue his farm work on his own.

"I like the spirit of a country which is developing,

improving and advancing," he explains. "In the U.S., it seems we have 'arrived,' and I believe a certain spirit has been lost . . . One reason I want to stay is that I feel I have more to give here, knowledge I can share that in the States might mean little."

Igou is sharing his knowledge of fertilizers, insecticides, herbicides and crops in order to improve the production and income of subsistence-level farmers near the town of Nicoya in northwest Costa Rica. The main crops in the area are rice, corn and beans.

He assists small farmers, whose land may range from only the plots around their houses to nine acre. "Places only a few miles apart can be at different levels," he noted. In some cases, he helps farmers already using insecticides and fertilizer to determine proper amounts, while only a few miles away he may have to explain what fertilizer is and does.

"The main problem is not this, but the fact that once the farmers are convinced of the advantages of these techniques, which they generally are, the high prices prohibit them from buying and making use of the product," he says. "The fertilizer price has doubled since I arrived."

Farmers generally work for someone else five hours each morning, earning less than \$1.50 for a morning's work, according to Igou. One hundred pounds of fertilizer costs about 10 days' wages; to rent a tractor, 20 days' pay.

"For this reason, some

farmers find it safer and cheaper to just put the corn seed in the ground and let it grow, come what may, doing weeding with a machete," says Igou.

To plant corn utilizing proper fertilization and insecticide protection, a farmer would need a bank loan, something unsophisticated farmers are often hesitant to seek, he adds.

During the five - to six-month dry season, when there is no farm work, the men of the household may leave to find jobs in another region.

Igou also turns his attention from farming to other areas during that November to April stretch.

"I fill my time by showing educational movies in small villages, preparing and beginning a survey of the farmers and their problems, doing some community work and continuing to teach English classes," he says.

Igou teaches English casually to friends in the evenings and teaches classes of university students two days a week. He also teaches a class composed of three priests and two school teachers.

The volunteer uses part of his Peace Corps living allowance to pay for materials used in the demonstration plots. The farmers keep the harvests from the plots, paying only land preparation and labor expenses.

"I am doing this because I feel the plots are important," he says. "First, they give the farmer more food than he would or-

dinarily have. It gives him the chance to plant without risk and learn the methods. Other farmers see the production, which is hopefully better than theirs, and have an interest in learning how they can do likewise."

Because he wanted to live in a "family situation," Igou boards in a comfortable home with a widow, her daughter, a niece and a high school student. His room faces the street and, since he usually has the door open, students and friends frequently drop by.

Igou has developed close friendships with many Costa Ricans in the neighborhood. "One of my friends invited me to cook the meals at his house for Mother's Day, so I cooked typical American foods for his parents and 14 brothers and sisters," recalls Igou. "I am friends of the family, and my friend writes to my parents in Spanish and they to him (in English).

"On weekends, I do some reading or studying, and always spend a great deal of time with my Costa Rican friends. We've visited volcanos, gone to the beaches nearby, to the movies and soccer games. I've learned that very simple things can be a lot of fun. We especially enjoy the local festivals and holidays and bullfights."

Nicoya is a fairly large town in the province of Guanacaste, known, because of the cattle raised there, as Costa Rica's "Wild West." The town has many stores, a park, an old colonial church

and a movie theater, Igou reports.

Costa Rica, which is located between Nicaragua and Panama, is usually hot all year.

"During the dry season, everything dries up, and it is hot and dusty, with temperatures in the 90s," says Igou. "In the wet season, things turn miraculously green and beautiful, with rain nearly every afternoon."

The language of the country is Spanish, a heritage of 299 years as a Spanish colony. With both high school and Peace Corps language training, Igou finds he speaks Spanish so well that a visiting American, who asked Igou directions to the beach, commented, "You speak English very well."

Costa Rica is the tiniest country in Central America. Its nearly two million people live in an area half the size of Virginia.

Igou graduated from Ithaca College in Ithaca, N.Y. in 1973 with a bachelor's degree in sociology and anthropology.

The son of Arthur C. and Betty Jane Igou, 752 Hershey Ave., Lancaster. Igou graduated from J.P. McCaskey High School in Lancaster in 1969.

He is one of about 120 Peace Corps volunteers working in Costa Rica in agriculture, rural development, education and health programs. Worldwide, about 6,500 Americans are serving as Peace Corps volunteers and trainees in 69 developing countries.

The Peace Corps is part of ACTION, the federal agency for volunteer service established in July, 1971 to administer volunteer programs at home and overseas.

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