



CCGAP Newsletter



APRIL 2003 Number 26

The Day the Water Pots Came to Town

By Sue Ellen Kingsley

"Susana Elena! Hurry! The pots are here!" Lorena and Francisca had been cavorting like seals in the rapids of the river but now they were on the other side and hollering at the top of their lungs. I looked up from where I'd been reading on the rocks in the shadow of the high river bank, the only place to be during the hottest hours of the afternoon. Sure enough, there was a truck on the opposite shore way off downstream! I gathered my soap and laundry, pulled on clean clothes, and disobeying my usual after-bath rule of climbing the steep bank s-l-o-w-l-y so as not to break out in a sweat, I rushed to the top and across the soccer field

checking my camera to make sure I had plenty of film. Well, yeah, I had plenty of film but by the time I made it back down to the river shore at the crossing point, the pots had all been ferried across, four trips in the cayuca, Pedro told me proudly. "Would you consider taking them back so I could get a picture?" I asked. The men laughed raucously at my joke. They were disobeying some rules of their own; instead of sobering their faces the minute I pointed the camera, several of them just couldn't stifle their excited smiles.

It was over a year ago that the health promoters had sent a request to CCGAP for a pot for every family in Fronterizo to boil their water. Not that they don't already boil the drinking water that they haul daily from shallow wells in

Pots on the river shore

The 74 cartons of pots have just been ferried across the river....

town, but there are days when a limited number of pots in a household means that there may not be enough boiled water to satisfy everyone's thirst. Drinking "agua crudo" (raw water) often results in diarrhea, especially in the children.

By now word had gotten up to the upper level of town and Geraldo was blaring on the loud-speaker, "Every family

must send someone to the river to carry the pots up to the village." Tumbling down the steep incline came the half of the community that wasn't already down here.

One by one, the 74 boxes were carried on heads in a line scrambling across the rocks, up the bank again and through the entire town to be stacked in one of the school rooms.

Two days later was the big day. A community meeting took place in the

Pots being carried up the bank on heads

continued on page 2..... 74 pots making the journey up the steep river bank...

In This Issue

Thank you letter from Fronterizo page 2

An Accompanier's Musings pages 3-5

Remigio & Aurelia send greetings page 6

CCGAP Dance & Drawing page 7

Transgenic Corn Risks page 8

The day the pots came to town

Continued from page 1

morning. At noon, the *alcalde* (mayor) told everyone to go home, eat dinner and come back for the distribution of the pots at 2PM. He invited our accompanier Hale and me to his house for a special meal of chicken and rice caldo with the other elected authorities.

When we got back to the schoolhouse, women and children were milling about. At last, as the name of each family was called, someone came to accept the pot. The pots were something, all right: forty litres, heavy, shiny aluminum, with a lid that fit perfectly.

The women of Fronterizo are especially appreciative of the pots. Now all they need is piped water.....

Picture of women with the pots

The cardboard cartons were special too; they were guarded closely.

After I got a picture of the women with their pots, it was time for the entertainment prepared by the teachers and schoolchildren. There were funny skits and songs and poems. The women even persuaded me to join them in a traditional dance, although they had to raid every woman's wardrobe till they found a corte (the bottom of the outfit) that was long enough for me.

All in all it was an exciting day for everyone and the people of Fronterizo were unanimous in expressing their appreciation of CCGAP's efforts in solidarity. They wrote the follow-

ing letter which I present here, both the original and my translation.

Caserio Fronterizo 10 de Mayo, Barillas, Huehuetenango, Guatemala, Centro America

Para: Comité de solidaridad de Copper Country CCGAP y Susana Elena

Nosotros organizados y miembros del caserío Fronterizo 10 de mayo, enviamos nuestros calurosos saludos a cada uno de ustedes los miembros del comité de solidaridad, deseamos buena salud y éxitos en sus labores diarias para el bien de donde se llega a ejecutar.

Nosotros las autoridades y los miembros de la comunidad nos sentimos muy orgullosos y muy contentos por el apoyo y ayuda que ustedes nos han brindado por la compra de nuestras ollas, les agradecemos mucho pero mucho a ustedes ya que son los únicos que nos han ayudado mucho a nosotros. Tal vez ustedes saben que nuestra comunidad está abandonada por instituciones y por el gobierno de nuestra paiz.

Nos sentimos muy alegres y contentos cuando cada madre de familia recibió su olla. Tal vez no somos capaces de expresar nuestro sentir hacia ustedes pero le decimos muchas gracias y muchas gracias por la ayuda que ustedes contribuyen con nosotros para el bien social de nuestra comunidad.

No habiendo más que manifestar, deseamos lo mejor en el presente, queda en cada uno de ustedes.

Firmado por alcalde y alcaldes auxiliar.

Santiago Francisco Francisco

Juan Pedro Gaspar

Andrés Morales Sales

From the settlement of Fronterizo 10 de mayo, Barillas, Huehuetenango, Guatemala, Central America
To CCGAP by way of Susana Elena

We, members of the community of Fronterizo 10 de Mayo, send our warmest greetings to you, the members of the solidarity committee (CCGAP) wishing you good health and success in your daily labors wherever they may take you.

We, the authorities and members of the community, feel very proud and happy with the support and assistance that you have offered in the purchase of the pots for boiling water. We are very grateful especially as you are the only ones who have helped us. Maybe you know how our community has been abandoned by institutions and by the government of our country.

We felt very joyful and happy when every mother of a family received her pot. Maybe we aren't very good at expressing what we feel but we say many thanks and thank you also for the many ways you have contributed to the well-being of our community.

Not having more to say at present, we wish the very best for each of you.

Signed by the mayor and deputy mayors

Santiago Francisco Francisco

Juan Pedro Gaspar

Andrés Morales Sales



An Accompanier's Monthly Musings

CCGAP's current accompanier, Hale Sargent, spent two years with the Peace Corps in Armenia. He is a journalist with experience in radio. His narrative talents are evident in his letters:

January 2003

"This is where we used to have to start walking," my coordinator told me as our minibus passed through the town of Pueblo Nuevo. He was bringing me into my community, Fronterizo 10 de Mayo, for the first time, and we still had an hour ride to go.

When a group of former refugees founded Fronterizo eight years ago, their original expedition – much of it on foot – took eight days. Fortunately for me, the minivan now brings you all the way to the Ixcán River, which marks the village's border. The road is dirt and gravel, though the people call it a highway. As the signs tell you along the way, it was recently completed by the army, perhaps less a gesture of goodwill than a means of maintaining a presence in the area.

A canoe takes you across the Ixcán, you climb up its muddy banks, and suddenly the jungle opens up onto the little world of Fronterizo. Seventy families live here, their houses sprinkled throughout the town, their bean and corn fields in the distance beyond. Young boys ride through on their horses, machetes hanging at their side; men hike down from the clouded hillside, bundles of firewood balanced on their backs; women keep the fire going in their homes, pressing out the stacks of tortillas that will feed their families for the day.



The new road hasn't been the only change around here. "That first trip, we didn't bring anything but a blanket, the pants we were wearing, and our kids," one friend joked with me. Since then, the people have put up an entire town by hand. There are now three schoolhouses and a day-care center, three little shops, four churches, a clinic, and an ever-running corn mill.

But where does Fronterizo go from here? When other refugee communities returned to Guatemala they were able to secure ownership of the land they were settling. Fronterizo hasn't been so lucky.

Most recently, this part of the jungle sheltered the Guerilla Army of the Poor who, it's safe to assume, never registered at the local municipality. Before that, legend holds the land was awarded to some soldiers loyal to a Depression-era dictator. Go back further, and soon you're looking for the descendants of people with titles like Viceroy or Brigadier. And then, of course, before that the land was quite possibly in the hands of its current occupants' ancestors.

After years of sorting through this mess and facing noth-

ing but endless bureaucracy and deadends, the people have grown tired. The town's land committee dissolved last year; now the village's strategy is to just wait and see what happens if any title-holders ever show up.

This uncertainty is the community's only real source of unease at the moment. The government can't formalize the schools until the village can prove whose land they're built on. And the people say one of their neighbors, a wealthy plantation owner, has already

Taking a look at headlines around the country, Fronterizo comes out looking pretty lucky.The UN is the latest to condemn the recent murders of indigenous activists.....

come for a visit, ominously bringing with him an engineer to survey the land they have worked so hard to cultivate.

Still, taking a look at headlines around the

country, Fronterizo comes out looking pretty lucky. Elsewhere in Guatemala, the collapse of global coffee prices threatens the livelihood of as many as 500,000 plantation workers. Drought and hunger plague the south, and the malnutrition rate nationwide is at least 40 percent. In the past two years, 134 judges have reported threats against their lives. The UN is the latest to condemn the recent murders of indigenous activists Antonio Pop Caal and Diego Velasco Brito. The EU warns it may withhold all foreign aid until Guatemala tackles its endemic corruption. Meanwhile, former dictator and genocide suspect Efraín Ríos Montt has formally declared his candidacy in presidential elections later this year, though he is constitutionally barred from doing so.

Gloomy picture.

But otherwise, in Fronterizo, the beans are freshly planted. A new mayor is about to take office. School is set to begin again after a sort of summer vacation. And the town is putting up nicely with the new American who still doesn't know which wells are for drinking and which are for washing clothes.

Local Rule Makes a Comeback

Fronterizo weathered a rough year politically in 2002, with some divisions over the mayor's leadership and his eventual resignation, but the community ended the year on a positive note with the election of its new local authorities. About 40 people turned out at the schoolhouse on Dec. 29 to elect the new mayor. The names of six nominees were written on a board, with each voter getting up to place a mark next to their choice. Santiago Francisco finished the vote on top. The mayor-elect says he wants to reunite the community and revive several languishing projects, including main-

..... Continued on page 4.....

tenance of the town's central field.

Chickens Also Make a Comeback

From its chorus of roosters to its territorial turkeys, Fronterizo's poultry have a character all their own. But the village fowl took a big hit in the fall of 2002 when a disease swept through town, killing nearly all of them.

It wasn't just the birds that were devastated. "We sell the chickens when we need some money for sugar or salt," Manuela Pedro Gaspar explained. Her family lost 30 birds, which she says could have fetched \$6.50 each.

Most families were able to buy a few adult birds, at considerable expense, and by the new year their first generation of chicks was nearing adulthood.

A family can have all their birds vaccinated for about \$2.50 – a small sum. But compared to the cost of replacing 30 birds, the extra investment is nothing worth ruffling feathers over.

February 2003

Walking back from the well, I saw one of Fronterizo's women struggling up a muddy hill. A five-gallon jug of water was balanced on her head. Another hung suspended from a strap on her back. Her infant son struggled under her arm. The woman looked resigned to this morning ritual, but she had so much to carry, I wanted to help.

"Lift with your legs!" I shouted.

No, actually I just took the jug off her head and helped her home. The not-too-surprising point I'm trying to make is that life for the people of Fronterizo 10 de Mayo is hard. One early morning I followed my neighbor to his field. We walked an hour on jungle trails through ankle-deep mud, his daily commute. The trip itself wore me out. I returned home, ate some cookies and took a nap; my neighbor, meanwhile, still had a whole day of planting beans ahead of him.

His was just another routine here in Fronterizo, where you're at the corn mill by 4 a.m. so you can begin making your day's tortillas; where you carry tree trunks down from the hills to make a little addition to your house; where your hands and machete wrench rows of corn out of the untamed jungle; where you enjoy the last few minutes of daylight watching the fireflies with your friends, and you're asleep by 8 p.m. so you can begin it all again the next day.

For all their toil, I hear a lot of laughter in Fronterizo,

and never once a complaint. I think often of my years in Armenia and how everyday there I was told how difficult life was and how little the people had. It was true, of course. It's true for Fronterizo as well, but those conversations don't happen here.

It makes me think that *poverty*, for all that term implies, is also a state of mind. Now, I don't mean to downplay life's realities, either in Armenia or in Fronterizo. Poverty is also having to choose which of your kids you can afford to send to elementary school. Poverty is having to travel four hours to the nearest hospital. But I'll give one more example of how Fronterizo has me thinking.

I went to a meeting of the town's women. They were picking a new committee to manage the corn mill. They laughed and joked, there was some sarcasm directed at the men, and after business, the meeting broke up so everyone could get some

lunch. It all seemed pretty typical and it felt pretty typical.

Then I refocused on the scene before me. I saw every woman with at least two toddlers, barefoot and playing with litter they picked up off the ground. The women were sitting on wood planks balanced on rocks. The meeting took place in a schoolhouse without four complete walls. The lunch they left to prepare was a bowl of beans and a stack of tortillas, the same thing they eat practically all day, every day.

So which description better suits the meeting? The laughing committee electing its new leaders, or the barefoot women in a broken down schoolhouse? Which is a better metaphor for Fronterizo itself? To me, clearly the first.

But you can't ignore the second.

March 2003

My front porch in Fronterizo is host to a regular stream of visitors. There are the regulars like little Maria, who likes to read Goldilocks and the Three Bears. There's Ana, the shop owner, whose little girl is starting to take her first steps. There's Marcos, who saunters by in his Osama Bin Laden Wanted Dead or Alive t-shirt. And then one day, a stranger in jeans and a cowboy hat swaggered up to my porch and shook my hand.

"Good morning," he said in English. "How are you?"

"Fiiine," I said curiously. Something was weird here -- there isn't much English spoken in this corner of Guatemala. His name, I learned, was Jeronimo, and he had just gotten back to Fronterizo the day before.

"Where have you been?" I asked.

"Mempees, Tennessee," was his thickly accented an-

Picture of Hale and little friend in sunglasses

Accompanier Hale Sargent with an admirer in Fronterizo.



swer. Jeronimo spent two years working a gauntlet of factories in the Volunteer State, without papers, and probably not making much more than a volunteer salary.



I asked Jeronimo what he liked best about the States. "The MacDonalds." Anything else? "Everything...Big Macs."

OK, so maybe Jeronimo's initial insights into life in the U.S. weren't that interesting. But the way he arrived there certainly was; paying a *coyote* hundreds of dollars, Jeronimo crossed the border in the middle of the night with a group of 17. Only he and two others made it on that first attempt without getting caught.

Of course, the other interesting thing is that Jeronimo went to the States at all. Most of the families currently in Fronterizo were among the thousands who fled Guatemala's internal violence in the 1980s, and they struggled for the right to return to their native soil. In 1993, 30,000 of them became the world's first group of refugees ever to negotiate the terms of their own return. Now, a decade after that hard-fought victory, and scattered among 42 returnee communities throughout Guatemala, many former refugees are finding poverty is the new enemy, and so they're forced to leave once again.

And it isn't just the former refugees heading north. The two former titans of Guatemalan industry -- tourism and coffee -- are these days second and a distant third to the top source of income here: money sent home from the U.S.

For as much as these waves of workers are changing the face of American society, the impacts are felt here at home as well. Take Fronterizo, a village so remote you have to cross a river, walk a half hour, and ride two hours in the back of a pick-up truck to get to the nearest bank or post office. Yet even here, a town of just 70 families, at least 14 fathers (20 percent) have left to work in the U.S.

Most say they plan to work a few years, save some money and come back. But still, you can see how seismically the migration has changed this town. The extra money now coming to a few families has created subtle class differences -- many of those families now have cement floors, extra animals, even some flashy paint decorating their houses.

And having a relative move north hasn't been a boon to everyone. Ana, the shop owner: her husband left six months ago, leaving her to take care of the fields, the house, the shop, and her six kids. She hasn't heard from him since. Maria, who likes to read Goldilocks: her dad left in January. He was a schoolteacher, and his departure left the town scrambling for a replacement.

Indeed, many feel the community has suffered since the *norteños* started taking off. There are fewer hands to help out in communal projects, and one friend told

me those families with extra cash are less inclined to attend meetings or take part in community activities.

For his part, Jeronimo is genuinely happy to be back in Fronterizo, as though having lived through some rigorous right of passage. He missed his family those two years he spent in Memphis, but now back at home he is enjoying his newly finished house. He can even afford to barbecue a sheep to celebrate his wife's birthday. With others seeing his success, the number of Fronterizo's men heading up will likely not stop at 14.

As for creating economic alternatives for the people, Mexico is spearheading a plan for Central America -- Plan Puebla Panama (PPP). PPP would unite southern Mexico, Panama, and all points in between in a massive, 90s-style trade and development zone. But quite apart from inspiring hope and optimism in the people, details on PPP are sketchy, and in the village certainly impossible to come by. Rumors of proposed hydroelectric dams as part of the project actually have at least one returnee community panicking that it will soon be 30 feet underwater.

Where will all those people go then?
Probably north.



The Copper Country Guatemala Accompaniment Project (CCGAP) is a group of organizations and individuals who form a sponsoring community for the Guatemalan village of Fronterizo 10 de Mayo, a community established on the 10th of May 1995 by a group of refugees who returned to Guatemala after 12-15 years in refugee camps in Mexico. CCGAP is committed to maintaining a long-term relationship with Fronterizo by recruiting and financially supporting accompaniers to live in the community as human rights observers in accordance with the agreements signed by the Guatemalan government in 1992. CCGAP endeavors to strengthen the ties between our communities and express our solidarity with Fronterizo by developing individual relationships and by giving financial support to small projects planned by the Guatemala community. We offer educational talks on Guatemala to groups here in the Copper Country along with the opportunity to become involved in this community-to-community relationship with the Mayan indigenous people of Guatemala.

The Guatemala Accompaniment Project (GAP) is a branch of the national organization, NISGUA (Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala). All donations to CCGAP are used to support accompaniers in Fronterizo and small community projects as requested by the members of Fronterizo. Some of our funds are used for newsletter printing and postage.

CCGAP Board members:

Rich Featherly, president
Floyd Henderson, treasurer
Terry Kinzel, secretary
Suzanne VanDam
Viki Weglarz
Sarah Green
Linda Rulison
Stephen Pluhacek
Beth Flynn

Thank you for your support.....

Alvord, Kate	Hardy, Barbara & Rick Loduha	Nelson, Nancy & David
Bach, David	Harris, Chuck & Dianna George	O'Malley, John
Bacon, Marlys	Hazleton, W	Passerello, Chris & Fran
Bacon, Eugene & Karen	Heinonen, Sarah	Pawlowski, Donald
Bell, Barbara	Hoag, Kevin	Perlinger, Judith & Noel Urban
Bewick, Shirley	Huntoon, Jackie & Chris Wojick	Peterson, Rolf & Carolyn
Bird, Nancy	Johnson, Keith & Julie	Pluhacek, Stephen & Heidi Bostic
Borsvold, Gordon	Kansa, Heikki	Praeger, Betzi
Bowen, Nancy	Kass, David & Carol	Roepke, Kerri
Boyce, James E.	Kindred, Merle	Rose, Bill & Nanno
Brown, Viola	Kingsley, Mitch & Ann	Rutherford, Scott
Carroll, Larry & Mary Haller	Kingsley, Karl & Karen	Sandretto, Rebecca
Chadde, Joan	Kirkish, Joe	Sargent, John & Sara Jane
Cole, Donna	Korth, Rob & Nancy	Schmied, Fr. Tom
DeKeyser, Susan	Kraft, Ken & Susie	Simula, Vern
Delta Kappa Gamma society	Leskela, Liala	Slavik, Allison
Derber, Ellen	Makholm, Linda	Sotala, Dennis
Driller, Mel	Mayer, Alex	Spiegel, Viola
Fiala, Frank & Emily	McKenzie, Doug & Lisa	Urion, Marilyn
Foley, Jo	Michigan Amigos	VanDam, Tom
Frankovich, Terry	Mihelcic, Jim & Karen Moran	Vozel, Leo
Greuer, Friederike	Monson, Paula & Terry	Wheeler, Barbara & Bob
Harbin, Roger & Alice	Morgan, Phil & Michelle	Whitt, Laurie Anne

Greetings from Remigio & Aurelia....

Translated by SEK

March 10th, 2003
From Remigio Martin Lopez with my wife
Aurelia Galicia Cruz

We send a cordial greeting to our distinguished friends, brothers and sisters in solidarity, where we were in Michigan and in Janka (Hancock). For everyone we wish success in the various kinds of work that you do daily. Also to the students where we shared our experiences from the past situation in Guatemala, that we wished to give a new perspective in relation to our lives in Guatemala.

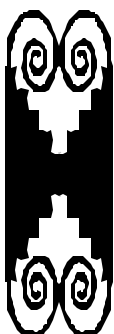
When we arrived in our community our friends and family marveled at seeing the photographs that we brought of life in the United States. Our community has different problems than those faced by your community, making a situation in which we don't qualify for support from our government. So we are always bothering you with our little requests, but now you realize how much need

there is in our community. For my part, I won't say more than that is the reality in Guatemala that affects our community more than others since we are so isolated.

I have no more to say except thanks to God our family is fine, and we send greetings to Doña Viqui (Viki Weglarz) and her husband, to Doña Barbara (Barbara Kendall) and her husband, and to Doña Maria (Maria Britz) and her family, and to Gradiz (Gladys Herrera) and her two sons and her husband. Greetings to Don José (Joe Heyman) and his wife that we remember when we were with them on the day of Jaloguin (Halloween). Also saludos to Don Guillermo (Bill Rose) and his wife Ano (Nanno), and to the chinese lady (Haiyan Campbell).

Again, greetings and hugs for each one of you. Be well.

Remigio Martin Lopez
Aurelia Galicia Cruz
Jorge Martin Galicia



___ YES I have enclosed stubs and payment for ___ raffle tickets @ \$5.00 apiece

___ I want to contribute an extra tax-deductible gift for the support of accompaniment and other projects as requested by the people of Fronterizo 10 de mayo

___ \$10

___ \$25

___ \$50

___ \$100

___ \$ ___ other

Name: _____

Address _____

Send to CCGAP
53044 Hwy M203, Hancock MI 49930

Your chance to win the blanket! More prizes! Dance to live music!

CCGAP will host its annual fund-raising event on May 17th at the Community Arts Center in Hancock starting at 7PM. There will be snacks, live music and dancing. Tickets for the drawing will be sold at the door.

In addition to the grand prize of the Guatemalan hand-woven wool blanket, there will be other textile prizes. Tickets are \$5.00 each.

You do not have to be present to win.

Fronterizo and CCGAP's proposed projects

As our supporters know, CCGAP's primary purpose continues to be sponsoring accompaniment in Guatemala to protect human rights. The cost to support an accompanier for six months is \$3000-3500. We have also committed to helping maintain a small pharmacy for the clinic run by health promoters, and we will continue to support the day care with supplies as needed.

This year the people of Fronterizo made some other requests that we are hoping to honor: the women would like to have a community kitchen in Fronterizo. It would be used to make the mid-morning nutritious snack for the school children and would also get used for community events.

Does "kitchen" make you imagine a stove and refrigerator, some counter space and cupboards? Well, in this case, it means a dirt-floored shelter with board walls and tin roof over a platform of wood and earth on which to

build the wood fire. Maybe some shelves on which to store the pots. The Hancock First United Methodist mission committee has already pledged to raise \$400 for this project.

Another request that CCGAP will honor is financial help for the construction of several dry-composting latrines, with the hope that this may encourage the use of these latrines throughout the village.

CCGAP would like to sponsor attendance at grass-roots gatherings of opposition to the Plan Puebla Panama that we described in the last newsletter; another proposal is to send a delegate from here to a human-rights seminar/delegation in Guatemala this summer.

We have more proposals and requests to consider. With your help, CCGAP has already done far more than we ever thought possible. So we are going forward, once again counting on your generous response.



**COPPER COUNTRY GUATEMALA
ACCOMPANIMENT PROJECT**
A Link between Guatemala and the
Copper Country

CCGAP
Sue Ellen Kingsley
53044 Hwy M-203
Hancock, MI 49930

Phone: 906-482-6827
Email: sekingsley@pasty.com

April 2003
Number 26

The problem with genetically modified food aid

opinion by SEK

Often genetically modifying foods involves inserting genes from a strain of bacteria into a plant, which allows for the creation of pest and herbicide-resistant plants such as soy, tomatoes, potatoes, cotton, and corn. Although the advantages of this invention can readily be seen, what is not so evident are the risks. It is generally agreed, even among the plant biologists, that health risks have not been studied. Risks to the environment, such as contamination of foundation seed crops and the possible creation of "superweeds" are recognized but considered inconsequential by the biotech corporations like Monsanto and DuPont.

It is to be feared that the agricultural use of GM seeds can lead to a loss of biodiversity; already it threatens to alter thousands of years of traditional farming practices and ancient seed strains. This is especially true of corn, a sacred crop for indigenous descendants of the Mayas, who call themselves the "people of corn".

Because of the known and unknown risks to health and the environment, many nations, particularly those of Europe but also Latin American countries have emphatically rejected the importation of genetically modified grains. This has resulted in a dramatic drop in corn prices in the US. So what happens to the corn that US farmers can't sell overseas? Studies commissioned by the Guatemalan environmental watchdog organization Madre Selva showed that USAID had distributed transgenic corn as international aid to Guatemala.

Now how can one fault giving free food to poor nations?

Consider the plight of a typical farmer (campesino) in Guatemala whose ancestors for generations until recently were able to grow their own corn and beans and vegetables if they had at least a small plot of land. But for many campesinos even a small plot of land has become difficult to find because much of the arable land in Guatemala is owned by large corporations. If a campesino wants to buy and plant a plot of land, he may only be given credit if he agrees to raise export crops such as coffee or broccoli. Well, okay, he can get by doing this because with the money from these crops he can buy corn to eat from his neighbor.

But then the bottom drops out of coffee prices because the World Bank and International Money Fund have been dictating the same requirements for credit around the world and now there is too much coffee on the market. It takes six years to get the first coffee crop. So now the farmer must decide whether to yank out his coffee trees and plant corn to eat or yet another export crop, or wait and hope coffee prices come back up. In the meantime, he can barely afford to buy corn from his neighbor, so when free corn, genetically modified or not, comes available, he can continue with the coffee crop even though at the lower prices. Maybe he will even experiment a bit by planting some of the USAID corn, which then contaminates nearby foundation seed corn. With the availability of free corn, his neighbor is now unable to sell his corn, so he also must turn to export crops and the uncertainty of the global market. So this "free food" has made both farmers dependent on it and at the same time threatened the biological diversity that is so important to the survival of species. That's the problem.

Information for this rant, admittedly an oversimplification of a complicated issue, was gleaned from nsgua.org and In These Times 2.10.03, "Seeds of Domination" by Karen Charman, and The Nation 10.10.02, "Sowing Disaster" by Mark Shapiro.