



Marylen Serna with MCC members in Cajibío

Local, Regional and National Agrarian Organizing in Cauca

By Patricia Rodriguez

Despite having been to Cajibío several times, it was my first time at Finca La Aromática, the cooperative farm run by the Movimiento Campesino de Cajibío (MCC). In previous trips, I had glanced at it from the bus on the way to nearby communities to learn of how the constant presence of armed actors (paramilitary, military, and guerrilla groups) were negatively impacting the security and well-being of local residents, particularly the youth. Despite never stopping to visit there, I knew of how much the Finca was producing. The office of the MCC in the nearby city of Popayán, was always filled with crates of lettuce and herbs that arrived every day from the Finca, for distribution at local restaurants.

The opportunity to visit the Finca during this delegation, with an added bonus of volunteering work on the land there for at least half a day, was already exciting enough. But what I and the other eleven delegates experienced upon arriving at the Finca was a magical moment, as we soon realized how much activity was occurring at the Finca.

Local, Regional and National Agrarian Organizing in Cauca continued

For one, La Aromática was the site of a three-day long meeting of the Coordinadora Nacional Agraria (CNA, National Agrarian Coordination), an umbrella organization that includes many agrarian campesino movements across the nation. They were meeting there to define the next steps in negotiations with the government in the aftermath of the Cumbre Agraria (Agrarian Summit) and a national agrarian strike (paro) that lasted several days in early May 2014. This strike was called off after President Santos agreed to sign a decree that was written collectively by the Political Commission of the Cumbre Agraria (quite a feat, incidentally), stipulating that there would be a single table of negotiations on agrarian issues, and that Cumbre representatives would be guaranteed a seat at the table. The meeting of CNA (which forms part of the Cumbre) was therefore organizing a set of mandates that mapped out policy alternatives to corporate dominance over land and resources that predominates today in Colombia. It speaks volumes to the effectiveness of organizing efforts of movements in Cauca that a different economic alternative for the nation was being discussed there, at the MCC finca, in the small rural town of Cajibío!

At the same time, a group of about forty youth from different parts of the region were also at the Finca, participating in a popular education workshop guided by discussion and reflection about organizing and

analyzing historical, political, social, and economic structural frameworks in Colombia. These will be the future grassroots leaders of Cauca and of the nation, and they are preparing well to espouse local popular economy projects, and to sustain the struggle for land, territory, and sovereignty at a national level.

The objective of all this organizing is to continue to construct the alternatives to government-led policies, and not sit around and wait for the government to act. There is indeed lots of skepticism around governmental policies. One of the most remarkable moments of the delegation in my opinion happened when our group met with two representatives from the governor's office, and Marylen Serna (MCC leader) asked them "how do you envision the Cumbre Agraria being a part of developing new policies that return the right to the land to the people and end the trend toward extractive concessions of vast amounts of lands to multinational corporations?" That question was followed by one of our own: "Do you think the principle of free, prior and informed consent mapped out in international law and domestic law for indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities needs to be recognized also for campesinos." The officials' answers ("Yes, we want to work with Cumbre organizations; no, we cannot do much about the consent issue, until campesino organization is achieved") revealed the importance of grassroots struggles for campesinos' rights. Though

not an ethnic group per se, campesinos want recognition of the fact that people that work the rural land (be they of whatever ethnicity) contribute in a major way to the national economy and to the culture of Colombia, and therefore deserve a say in the delineation of agrarian policy. Their efforts to build coalitions among civil society sectors to support campesino recognition are the only way this will ever be achieved. The participatory dialogues that these groups have engaged in for at least the last four years are themselves incredible things to witness. In my opinion, the approach of Congreso de los Pueblos of breaking the numerous discussions into thematic areas and then deliberating as a group makes a lot of sense; only through several iterations of (for instance) community dialogues around the themes of land, territory, and sovereignty, or the theme of peace with social justice, can groups generate a capacity to develop mandates, or legislation, and begin their implementation without waiting for the government. Within this 'intentionality in the collective', international solidarity plays a huge role in bringing attention to these mandates, such that these new plans of life are not washed away with mere changes in who officially governs Colombia. I write this, just as I hear news of the inauguration of the Colombia chapter of the Social Movement branch of ALBA (Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas). The alternatives are built at every level, with every effort.

Action On Colombia is the official newsletter of the Colombia Support Network, a national peace and justice network of groups and individuals working to promote respect for human rights in Colombia and a just relationship between the United States and Colombia through grassroots activism.

CSN supports a nonviolent, negotiated resolution to the conflict in Colombia.

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'Solidarity Economy Towards a Dignified Life: Biofábrica Campesina of the Movimiento Campesino de Cajibío'

By Frank Cetera

With little to no governmental help for sustainable agricultural production, and the high and increasing costs for items such as chemical pesticides associated with industrial agriculture, small farmers in Cauca have turned to the production of compost.

"Systemic transformation" may be the most descriptive strategic terminology for the role the Biofábrica Campesina project plays in the local Cauca solidarity economy movement. And it may also be the most important concept, as Biofábrica is not only centered on creating food sovereignty, but also leading to social change from economic equality and reciprocity, and partnerships at the local, regional, national, and international levels for advancing the small farmer movement and its goals.

The economic difference to the small farmer can be staggering. One bag of compost costs approximately 10,000 pesos, that's 7 to 8 times less than a bag of chemical fertilizer. In addition, the chemical fertilizer has to be shipped in from outside locations, whereas the compost is sold right within the local community in which it is produced, reducing the need for

expensive transportation infrastructure arrangements.

The income of a small farmer in Colombia is much smaller compared to that of the minimum salaried worker in Colombia. But their needs are also much less in order to provide for themselves the concept of a dignified life. This dignified life reflects on many small farmers' desires to restore ancestral heritages of their lifestyles related to farming practices, nourishing of their children, and maintaining a level of personal and familial sovereignty, without giving in to lifestyle changes brought about by neo-liberal policies in which many families are forced from their land and into urban areas and dead-end jobs and living conditions out-of-sync with dignified life (traditions). This compost production business, which alone is supporting eleven families that work on the project, is able to provide for these families a major contribution towards the realization of this dignified life.

The ecological benefit to the land and the small farmers' success is also huge. As climate change affects growing seasons and rain cycles, rainwater collection and irrigation timing have become more difficult. Compost has that beautiful ability (unlike purely

chemical fertilizer products), due to the organic matter contained in it, to hold water in the soil for an extended time, effectively providing a buffer zone for irrigation practices.

The Biofábrica composting operation was begun with the financial support from the Movimiento Campesino de Cajibío through a 2,000,000 peso investment. But this was not purely a gift. Although 40% of this money was granted to the small farmers, the remaining 60% was disbursed in the form of a loan at very low 1% interest. This loan, as it is paid back, becomes part of a revolving cycle of reciprocity among the community members, and essentially seeds the next solidarity economy project—such as a forthcoming egg production business.

The small farmer solidarity economy was further highlighted at the second Feria Campesina coordinated by the MCC on July 4, 2014. Seeds, knowledge, flavors, farm products, and cultural heritage (in the form of art and dance) were exchanged during a day of celebration. But more than a celebration, the event was meant to highlight the campesino's campaign to be recognized as a distinct population by the Colombian State—a community in other words, with rights and responsibilities, and a voice in Colombian governmental proceedings.

Looking at one of the most quoted definitions of the solidarity economy, as provided by Alliance 21—which convened the Workgroup on the Solidarity Socioeconomy in 2003, one can only already recognize that these economic and community building activities outside of the profit-driven corporate culture of current neo-liberal economics demonstrates such a recognized population already exists among the campesinos:

"Solidarity Economy designates all production, distribution and consumption activities that contribute

The Real Plans of the Santos Administration for Rural Colombia

By Jack Laun

Note: In writing this article I have drawn substantially upon analysis by the Colombian journalist and political observer Alfredo Molano Bravo and upon ideas presented by Marylen Serna, leader and spokesperson for the Agrarian Summit, whose views are more fully expressed in her article in this Newsletter.

For many years agrarian reform has been a subject of great debate and contention in Colombia. It was a major motivator for the FARC guerrillas when their organization was formed in the mid-1960's. Agrarian reform projects have been presented on several occasions, but real reform beneficial to campesino families has not occurred. However, in 1994 Law 160 of that year provided apparent protection to

campesinos by establishing that "Titling of unappropriated lands (baldios) in rural areas cannot be effectuated in benefit of natural persons or legally-created persons who are owners or possessors, by any title, of other rural lands in the national territory." The purpose of the law was to make available to campesinos lands which had never been registered to private persons. Many campesino families had never held registered title to their lands and many worked very small plots of land, barely allowing them to subsist on what they produced.

For several years campesino organizations have promoted development of what Law 160 called "zonas de reserva campesina", or campesino reserve zones. These were to be areas set aside for use by campesinos, whose right to them was to be protected legally. But rather than follow this model, the administration of President Juan Manuel Santos has developed a different plan, based upon the President's view that large-scale commercial agricultural development should be the focus of his government's plans for the future. For the eastern plains region, where there are vast stretches of unused land, the Santos government has proposed what it calls "Zonas de interes de desarrollo economico

y social", or Zones of Interest of economic and social development, which investors will be able to develop using contracts or concessions, or some other means, as long as they associate campesinos, (who are deluded into thinking this arrangement would be for their benefit) in their projects. Legislation to establish these entities has been introduced under the rubric "productive alliances". The new legislation will benefit rich Colombians and transnational corporations determined to undertake large-scale agricultural projects for export on lands they can obtain cheaply. As journalist/commentator Alfredo Molano Bravo has written in a very perceptive article in the newspaper *El Espectador*, the Santos government is using "a strategy to transfer the risks of production to the allied campesinos, to bind cheap labor to large enterprises and to substitute these arrangements for the figure of the campesino reserves created by the manipulated (manoseada) Law 160 of 1994. The Law of Baldios will be converted into the formula to frustrate in advance what is being agreed to in Havana (in the peace discussions between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrillas)." *El Espectador*, "Ley VIP", Bogota, October 18, 2014..

'Solidarity Economy Towards a Dignified Life continued

to the democratization of the economy based on citizen commitments both at a local and global level."

These solidarity economy actions by the campesino also highlight the goals and challenges that we as a sister-community, and international brethren, now share together in the face of government corruption and corporate domination. And these shared goals and challenges hold the potential for galvanizing the solidarity economy movement within Cauca, Colombia, and everywhere else around the world.

International profiteering through capitalism will stop at no end as we know, because capitalism has no directive to include human rights over revenues. But the campesinos in their

actions, and those of us in solidarity, can continue to create a new world order of collective good, mutual aid, self-development, and economies based on care as central to our worldview.

Social and economic change must follow a twofold path of political engagement and the underlying, surging path of direct action through solidarity economy actions.



Delegation members meeting with MCC leader John Henry Gonzalez at the Finca.

A Delegation of Activists to Cajibío

By Patricia Rodriguez

In July 2014, eleven people from Ithaca, Syracuse and Cortland (and one from Washington, D.C.) travelled to Cajibío, Colombia, on a delegation that celebrated the ten-year anniversary of the 'sister community' sociocultural exchange and solidarity project between Central New York- Colombia Support Network and the Movimiento Campesino de Cajibío (Campesino Movement of Cajibío, MCC), a grassroots organization that organizes collectively to defend the rights of campesinos (small farmers), indigenous and Afro-Colombian groups, workers, women, children, and students. The delegates included local activists on many issues facing our own Finger Lakes region, such as campaigns against fracking, immigrant labor rights, the spread of ideas around strengthening local economies, and other people. This idea emerged after a series of report-backs from my own witnessing of the 20,000-people gathering of the MCC with other national-level organizations that are part of the Congreso de los Pueblos (Congress of the People) in Bogotá in April 2013, which have resulted in alternative proposals about peace with social justice for Colombia beyond the potential cease-fire and moderate reforms currently being discussed in Havana, Cuba. Nearly three months after our return from the delegation, it already is clear that our Central New York-Cajibío sister community relationship has been given a tremendous breath of fresh air and energy to continue working together at a moment of strong organizing among our friends in Colombia.

The delegation was organized around learning and sharing related to seed and knowledge exchanges, cooperative production projects such as organic compost, and how to sustain 'buen vivir'

(good living) ideas. In April 2014, the MCC helped to organize a national agrarian strike which culminated in a presidential decree signed by Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos, but designed by the grassroots groups that converged in the Cumbre Agraria Campesina, Étnica y Popular (Agrarian Campesino, Ethnic, and Popular Summit). The decree maps out the participatory processes through which a new agrarian policy for the country would be conducted. Though the negotiations were delayed significantly as the recently re-elected government of President Santos decided on ministers and bureaucratic appointments, it seems that they are back on track. The strike and the 'mesa unica' or single table of negotiation with the government both aim at changing the pattern of extreme land concentration and state support of the neoliberal agribusiness model existing in Colombia.

The campesinos in the municipality of Cajibío, Colombia face extreme violence as they try to hold on to their land. In 2000 and 2001, two massacres in the communities claimed the lives of fourteen victims, and thousands of other killings across Colombia have occurred

at hands of armed actors, with devastating effects, such as forced displacement of families to urban centers. The Campesino Movement of Cajibío has supported the families of the victims of massacres in Cajibío, as they continue to fight for truth, justice, and reparations. The delegates heard that government designed victims and land restitution programs implemented since 2011 have failed the communities, due to immense hurdles created by the continued armed conflict and impunity for perpetrators of violence. Since the Colombian courts have not helped in obtaining the truth, the families have turned to the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (IACHR) for their cases to be heard. This will be a long term quest for justice, as the IACHR is still hearing other cases accepted at that forum in 2011; the two massacres in Cajibío were only entered at IACHR in 2013.

We all learned (and shared) a tremendous amount about building solidarity, and how and what it means to demand sovereignty over a territory, a right that has been lost in the governments' single-minded quest

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Children dancing at the Finca

A Delegation of Activists to Cajibío continued

for large-scale investment. A main goal of the delegation from the Colombia Support Network-Central New York Sister Communities was to strengthen the links with grassroots groups in and beyond the Central New York region, and to bring attention to how the governments of the United States and Colombia have been complicit with the human rights and economic situation we witnessed in Colombia.

We think it is important to share with our local communities and lend support to the non-violent activism of Colombians but also local CNY residents struggling to protect their communities. We organized a 'report-back' and sharing in Ithaca on September 17th, attended by many local community leaders, in which we premiered the documentary 'Seeking Truth, Justice and Reparations,' which was filmed by our own delegate Caroline Podraza. This will be followed

by a speaking tour by MCC leader, Marylen Serna Salinas on the week of November 17-20, 2014, in preparation for her participation at the annual Vigil to Close the School of the Americas (or WHINSEC, Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation), which is a military training facility that trains Colombian and other Latin American police and military officers in violent combat-training tactics at Fort Benning, GA (November 21-23); some of these officers have been implicated in numerous murders and human rights violations in their countries. Marylen will speak there about the work of Congreso de los Pueblos and the mandates being collectively developed for peace with social justice that (unlike the government's peace negotiation) insists on revisiting the free-market economic approach in favor of measures that bring sovereignty back into the picture.

Considering all the social, environmental and political issues at stake, this is indeed a key moment for collaboration between the many grassroots organizations there, and here. The determination of the work of the MCC and other social organizations in Cauca in face of many difficulties is inspiring for sure, and the change that they are constructing gives us hope for a better world.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Marylen Serna also visited Madison after speaking at the SOA Watch program. Her remarkable address at a noon meeting at the University of Wisconsin on November 25 was filmed and copies will be available from the CSN office in Madison in the near future.



Cultural activity at the Finca

Dear subscriber to CSN's Newsletter

For several years you have received this Newsletter bringing news about the political situation and rural communities in Colombia. We invite you to become a member of this incredible network of solidarity with the people who have suffered from the war in Colombia. CSN has contributed greatly over the years to educate people about Colombia and to help prevent killings there, bringing news directly from the people. Please consider making a donation to support our work via Paypal at the following link: <http://colombiasupport.net/donate/>

The Colombia Support Network

Action on Colombia

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The Meeting in Solidarity of the Cajibío and Central New York Communities

By Marylen Serna Salinas

Translation by CSN volunteer translator Jack Laun

“Solidarity is the tenderness of the peoples.”

—Ernesto (Che) Guevara

The situation of armed conflict which Colombia is now experiencing, and the impact it has had on the life of communities, organizations and their leaders, has demanded a strong effort denouncing and calling attention to the situation on the national and international levels, for the purpose of protecting and keeping safe the risky labor of defending life and human rights. In this context, the Campesino Movement of Cajibío (MCC) presented the proposal of sister community relationships with communities and organizations in other countries. In that way the sister relationship with the sister communities of the Central New York Region (Ithaca, Cortland and Syracuse) began. For nearly 10 years we have been sister communities seeking a more just world. We have had a permanent interchange with these communities and a mutual reinforcement of our work. On the other hand, the action in conjunction with the Colombia Support Network (CSN) has meant that this labor of the sister relationship has had important political connotations, due to the possibility of including both national institutions and those in the United States among those we approach to change policies which so much affect the region.

In the month of June of this year the MCC received a visit of the sister communities with the objective of strengthening the ties of solidarity, understanding better the Colombian reality and consolidating actions together in support of the rights of victims and work for ecological protections in agriculture. The 12 persons who participated in the delegation are important social and environmental activists, university professors and students, and

human rights defenders, among other things. They have demonstrated a great commitment to the construction of a more just and humane world. During the days of their visit the delegation, in common with the communities and leaders of the campesino movement, carried out actions such as the following:

As a part of showing the communities the context of the problems of the region and the country, a meeting (Encuentro) was carried out with social organizations of Cauca Department (Province) to share with the visitors a view of the reality of the country and to inform them about the actions which those popular processes have been developing for the transformation of the situation of the countries.

Later we held a work session at the Aromatica farm, owned by the MCC, where the visitors participated in working the land and sowing seeds exchanged between the MCC and the communities from the United States. They learned in a direct way the agro-ecological development of the farm by agro-ecological producers and other members of the community.

During the visit, and as an important activity in the context of the visit, the Municipal Campesino Agro-Ecological Fair was held. In this event products of close to 400 men and women producers were integrated and exchanged--handcrafts, seeds, products, foods, and artistic expressions which showed the work of their own food-and economic-sovereignty which they are developing with the idea of building self-sufficient food-producing territories. There the sister communities delivered seeds, products, handcrafts, and other items brought from the United States. This public gesture strengthened the relationship and showed that, although the Colombian and the United States communities are so distant from each other, they have great similarities in the struggle for a better world.

The Concert for Peace was planned and took place with the idea that through the medium of music, of singing and of poetry, a call was made to continue building peace with social justice. The event brought together artists such as Arlen Segura, a campesino singer and songwriter who, from his territory and as a person who has experienced the armed conflict from close range, made a call to his listeners to be protagonists of a true peace. And in the Concert Colleen Kattau and Carlos Rodriguez of the sister community sang in duet so that all the men and women who attended the concert in the Casa de la Cultura of the city of Popayan felt that joy of the get-together and the common determination to work for peace.

Almost at the end of the visit a meeting was arranged with the organization of victims of the MCC, in which up-to-date information was presented for the cases of the massacres of La Rejoja and Pedregosa in Cajibío in the year 2000, in which 15 people were murdered, victims of paramilitarism. These cases still remain in impunity. At the meeting the relatives of the victims asked for solidarity and support so that the truth of what happened will be known and justice will be done, with full reparations. At present the cases are in the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights, to whom it is necessary to insist that there be significant advances.

At the end of the 8-day visit a meeting was held with the office of the Governor of Cauca, for the purpose of communicating politically to the departmental authorities through a call to recognize the work of the social organizations and the risks that their activities signify for the men and women leaders; but, above all, the call to commit themselves to the application of policies favorable for the communities, such as food sovereignty, ecological agriculture, fortifying the economy itself, and defending human rights.

On Saturday January 17, 2015 CSN will join with the Returned Peace Corps Volunteers of Wisconsin-Madison to sponsor the 34th *Freeze for Food*, a 5-kilometer run/walk and a 10-kilometer run beginning and ending in front of the Vilas Park Shelter in Madison. Proceeds go to the sister community of CSN/Dane County (Madison), the Peace Community of San Jose de Apartado, to be used for food-related projects. The cost is \$20 in advance and \$25 on race day. We invite all CSN members and friends to come join us!



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