

# Applied Agricultural Science

## THE PEACE CORPS: CREATING SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS

As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you help translate host country development plans into community level action, thus improving the lives of local people. You arrive, not with funds or equipment, but with skills and knowledge as well the willingness to adapt them to your community. A successful project is one that continues to function effectively after you leave.

Before starting your two-year assignment, you receive up to three months of training that focuses on language, cross-cultural, and technical skills. It is usually provided in the country where you serve. The training focuses on language and cultural training to give you an understanding of the country's governmental system, cultural norms, and interpersonal relations. This assists you in becoming an integral member of the community. Technical training enhances your ability to effectively transfer your skills and knowledge to host-country people.

## YOUR WORK AS A PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER

In many of the countries where Peace Corps Volunteers work, the economic base of rural communities is founded upon agricultural enterprise. As an Applied Agriculture Science Volunteer, you help rural families produce, use, store, and sell the food they need by increasing agricultural productivity, improving nutrition awareness, and organizing income generation activities. You serve as a technical advisor to government agriculture extensionists, community members, and other Volunteers in seeking appropriate solutions to complex agriculture problems. Through community assessments, workshops, demonstrations, and training programs, you strengthen outreach extension services. In collaboration with male and female farmers, women or youth groups, schools, government extension agencies, or non-profit organizations, you may do the following types of projects:

### Field Crop Production

- Conduct field trials and demonstrations with small scale farmers to experiment with various techniques of crop rotation, erosion control, cover crops, seed production, crop selection, soil fertility management, irrigation, and integrated pest management. These methods aim to increase the production of staple crops such as rice, corn, millet, sorghum, and cassava.

### Community, School and Home Gardens

- Work with farmers and students to improve production of indigenous or newly introduced varieties of fruits and vegetables by using "bio-intensive" gardening techniques that maximize production in a limited area or growing season.
- Promote inter cropping fruits or vegetables with field crops to improve local diets.

### Food Storage and Preservation

- Work with families or cooperative groups on methods to decrease post-harvest losses to insects, rodents, or spoilage by the use of home storage units or grain treatments using ash or other locally available materials that are effective for pest control and preservation.

### Marketing

- Work with local farmers who are organizing themselves into marketing cooperatives in order to gain higher market prices for their produce. The difference might be selling tomatoes in a local market for 10 cents/lb., or organizing collective transportation to a regional market where tomatoes sell for 50 cents/lb.

It is vital that you understand not only the myriad of technical problems, but also the cultural views and social and political context in which you operate. Your assignment may have little or no established structure or schedule. You continually define your role in response to the needs of the local people. Your willingness to integrate into your community and help your hosts find appropriate solutions can encourage people to participate. Your creativity, flexibility, self-motivation, and self-discipline may be vigorously challenged as you establish credibility and adapt to your new environment.

## EXAMPLES OF CROP EXTENSION PROJECTS

**Senegal.** Agriculture in most Sahelian countries is plagued by erratic rainfall, wind and water erosion, poor soil fertility, deterioration of the natural resource base, and government policies that often favor increased cash crop over food grain production. With the Senegalese population growing at an annual rate of nearly three percent and cereal production declining in many areas, agricultural development is an urgent problem. Peace Corps Volunteers work with farmers to assess the best ways to adapt new varieties and technologies to the indigenous and traditional practices. They conduct field-based trainings and demonstrations with a team of other Volunteers who are assigned to agriculture, natural resources, health, and small enterprise development projects.

**Honduras.** Peace Corps Volunteers in Honduras work with families who farm on steep slopes that are very susceptible to erosion. Many farmers practice migratory agriculture, in which a parcel of forest is slashed and cultivated for a period of three to five years, or until further cultivation is not feasible. Volunteers work with farmers to develop techniques that are more ecologically sustainable and financially viable. Examples include row tillage, construction of live erosion barriers, and cover crops. The project has been managed since 1989 in collaboration with the Honduras Ministry of Natural Resources and several private voluntary organizations.

**Ecuador.** The gross national product in the agriculture sector has experienced a positive growth rate in the past year. Agricultural exports of coffee, cacao, shrimp, banana, and flowers have increased. Farmers are interested in diversifying production by adding non-traditional crops for better export opportunities. At the same time, the production of most basic food staples for internal consumption has diminished greatly, resulting in deficits that force the country to import food at an increased cost to the consumer. Peace Corps Volunteers are helping to improve the technical capacity of small farmers, the productivity of cultivated land, the marketing systems for agricultural produce, and the processing of products. They plan and conduct workshops on topics such as: construction of small domestic animal cages, installation of simple grain storage facilities, and integrated pest management. They also provide education in nutrition to improve the nutritional quality of the local diet and thus, the local people's health.

## A REWARDING EXPERIENCE

Service as a Peace Corps Volunteer offers you a unique opportunity to learn about critical development issues from the inside by helping people address community problems that they themselves have identified. You can make a tremendous contribution to the lives of others. At the same time, you discover that your experience is as much about your learning as it is about teaching.

Volunteer service develops or accentuates your professional abilities and enhances your personal growth. Virtually all returning Volunteers agree they have received far more than they have given. Recent college graduates gain hands-on experience and sometimes further define their career goals. Others confirm their commitment to their profession and receive career-boosting international experience. Retirees bring their accumulated life experiences to those that need and respect them.

Many employers place great value on the Peace Corps experience. You will find that your worldview, resourcefulness, and cross-cultural skills set you apart. You can have easier access to federal government jobs or earn college credit or scholarships because of your Peace Corps service. Whatever you decide to do after Peace Corps, you will bring with you a rare knowledge of the world, of people, and of yourself.

While there may be days of frustration and disappointment, there will also be a lifetime of satisfaction. The courage, patience and fortitude you call upon helps you understand why Peace Corps is still the toughest job you'll ever love.

## VOLUNTEER PROFILE

Most Agricultural Science volunteers are recent college graduates with degrees such as agronomy, plant science, horticulture, or botany. Others have non-agriculture degrees and at least 18 months of full-time farm experience. These volunteers also possess several of the following:

- interest in and knowledge of organic farming;
- knowledge of food preservation and storage;
- general knowledge of agriculture issues;
- demonstrated leadership skills;
- patience, tenacity, and problem-solving skills.



*It is the policy of the Peace Corps to provide equal opportunity in all its programs for all persons and to prohibit discrimination based on race, color, national origin, religion, age (over 40), sex, disability, political affiliation, and sexual orientation in the recruitment, selection, placement, service, and termination of Peace Corps Volunteers.*