Local Tourism in Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua

Case Study

Finca Esperanza Verde
CREATING EMPLOYMENT THROUGH TOURISM IN NICARAGUA

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The SEEP Practitioner Learning Program in Local Tourism: Creating employment based on the development of local tourism in Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua is funded by the Argidius Foundation. The opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and the view of this paper does not necessarily represent those of The SEEP Network, the Argidius Foundation, or any of the individuals or organizations that participated in this case study. Rather, the views in this paper are a compilation of the view presented during this PLP program.
About The SEEP Network

The SEEP Network is a global association whose members committed to reducing poverty through the power of enterprise. Its membership of more than 80 organizations creates a network that is active in more than 140 countries and reaches over 35.4 million microentrepreneurs and their families.¹

SEEP’s mission is **Connecting microenterprise practitioners in a global learning community.**

About the Practitioner Learning Program

The Practitioner Learning Program (PLP) is a SEEP Network initiative that explores key issues facing the microenterprise field. The PLP methodology was developed by SEEP as a way to engage microenterprise practitioners in a collaborative learning process to document and share findings and to identify effective and replicable practices and innovations to benefit the industry as a whole. The PLP combines a small-grant program with an intensive facilitated-learning process, usually over a period of one or more years, and utilizes workshops, e-mail discussion groups, conference calls, and distance learning. As participants implement activities in the learning network, they identify effective, replicable innovations and document these findings to benefit the industry as a whole.

The PLP’s model of “learning by doing” maintains a focus on results, with the added benefit of increased institutionalized knowledge. The PLP focuses on learning at three levels: the individual organization, the PLP group, and the industry at large.

At the individual level, organizations have the opportunity to share with other organizations and to revise their individual work plans. At the group level, all participants involved in the PLP share experiences and ideas. Participants come to consensus on common themes they want to explore as a group, called the learning agenda. At the industry level, the PLP participants develop learning products (publications) documenting their lessons learned, challenges, and promising practices, to benefit the microenterprise and microfinance industry.

For more information on SEEP PLP initiatives and SEEP’s more than 100 learning products, please see The SEEP Network website, [www.seepnetwork.org](http://www.seepnetwork.org).

About the Argidius Foundation

SEEP would like to thank the Argidius Foundation for providing the funding for this PLP. The Argidius Foundation provides financial support to a number of organizations to fund projects focusing on employment creation for low-income populations. Founded in 1956, the Foundation follows a strategy of support for market-driven enterprise development initiatives to alleviate poverty around the world. Recognizing that poverty is multidimensional, the Argidius Foundation seeks to create sustainable employment and leverage additional positive social impact through areas such as education, health, and the environment in Eastern Europe and West Africa, as well as in Latin America where the foundation has focused its efforts in Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua.

1. Source: member self-reporting to SEEP or from members’ websites and annual reports. Figures include association members of SEEP and their member MFIs. Some double-counting may occur.
About the Authors

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Introduction

The SEEP Network’s Ecotourism PLP\(^1\) examined strategies to promote sustainable job creation and increased incomes for small enterprises working both directly and indirectly in the growing ecotourism industries in Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. SEEP defined enterprises working directly in the industry as those who cite tourism as their main industry and offer services or products directly to tourists, such as accommodations, guided tours, and cultural performances. The emphasis of this PLP is on small enterprises as the vehicle for increased employment, since globally the tourism industry is dominated by small enterprises.

Fact: Small enterprises generate over 50 percent of all employment in the tourism industry.\(^2\)

Growing small enterprises that work directly in ecotourism will therefore provide a means by which to increase employment and alleviate poverty, since the majority of the poor also find their employment through small enterprises.

Established in 1998, Finca Esperanza Verde (translation: “Green Hope Farm”) started as a project of the Sister Communities of San Ramón, Nicaragua (SCSRN). Founded by North Americans Richard and Lonna Harkrader in 1993, SCSRN is registered as a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization in the United States and certified as a nongovernmental organization in Nicaragua. Finca Esperanza Verde (FEV) is an eco-lodge and organic coffee farm that provides an environmentally friendly source of income for local Nicaraguans, as well as serving as a financial resource for community projects. FEV is focused on attracting international customers while keeping most of the economic and other benefits in the community. It strives to protect the natural environment, provides local people with high-quality employment opportunities, and reinvests in the community of San Ramón. Although FEV is technically a project of SCSRN, it functions as a stand-alone, profitable business.

The idea of a financially sustainable eco-lodge and coffee farm that also contributes to local development fits with the growing trend of businesses providing market-based approaches to poverty reduction. Such businesses are commonly known as social enterprises. Finca Esperanza Verde earns enough revenue to support itself and generate a profit, a percentage of which is reinvested in community social projects conducted by SCSRN.

Finca Esperanza Verde was selected for this case study because it is a financially sustainable ecotourism business that has had a positive impact on the local community. This case study will focus on how the FEV business model has maximized the capture of the lodge’s revenues within the community of San Ramón, improved its products and services, and increased benefits to the community. It will begin by discussing FEV’s business strategies, review the lessons learned, and conclude by summarizing the FEV’s key success factors of:

- Meeting market demands,
- Providing community inclusion,
- Cultivating win-win relationships, and
- Making a positive impact.

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1. This PLP is focused on using ecotourism to create employment and alleviate poverty in Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, and was funded by the Argidius Foundation. Two other learning products came from the PLP:
   - seven tips for win-win relationships in the ecotourism value chain
   - measuring the economic impact of ecotourism in local communities

The Enterprise

Finca Esperanza Verde has received international recognition as a model for poverty alleviation through sustainable tourism. FEV has won numerous international awards including Virgin Holiday’s Responsible Tourism Award for Small Hotels, the Smithsonian Magazine’s Sustainable Tourism Award, and the Central American Green Initiative’s Best Eco-lodge in Nicaragua. FEV provides jobs and much-needed income to the people of San Ramón, while offering tourists a cultural immersion experience, connections with the people of San Ramón, and an opportunity to support the community through an economic model that is self-sustaining.

Finca Esperanza Verde is solely owned by SCSRN, however FEV is self-sustaining through the revenues generated from its tourism and coffee sales. FEV revenue and expenses are kept separate from other SCSRN projects, and donations to SCSRN are not used to support FEV.

Background and Business Approach

When the Harkraders founded SCSRN and then FEV, their mission was to improve the quality of life for residents of San Ramón by fostering friendship and cooperation through a sister city program with Durham, North Carolina. They believed that these interpersonal exchanges would lead to successful social and economic development projects for San Ramón.

The business model of Finca Esperanza Verde is similar to most social enterprises: using a market-driven approach to run profitable lines of business that drive and contribute to a social cause—in the case of FEV, the community of San Ramón, Nicaragua. The business operations of FEV include an eco-lodge, tourism activities, and an organic coffee farm. Since its inception, FEV has set its prices to be competitive on international markets while providing enough income to pay workers well, ensure environmental sustainability, and invest 10 percent of its profits into community projects. In addition to achieving their social mission, these practices have brought FEV benefits and ultimately helped increase its bottom line. Starting as a social project of SCSRN, and growing into a business, a cornerstone of FEV’s business model is based on inclusion and community involvement at all levels. This approach is behind virtually all business decisions, including how to treat employees, ensuring that nonemployees have the opportunity to be involved, making responsible supply chain decisions, and giving back to the community. However, as critical as community inclusion and ownership of a business approach are, a social enterprise has to be a successful enterprise in order to pursue and support its social causes.

Lesson: A Social Enterprise Is an Enterprise First

Much of the initial business for FEV came from personal connections of the Harkraders. Access to this high-end market allowed FEV to build the capacity of its human capital as the customer base expanded. By following sound business principles of understanding the ecotourism market and placing value on its natural and other resources, FEV has matured beyond these initial linkages.

Understand the Market

Based on its geographic location and natural resources, Finca Esperanza Verde has always had potential in two niche markets—ecotourism, and coffee. FEV ownership and management knew that they needed to draw on a competitive advantage in both areas to survive and grow. Finca Esperanza Verde has maximized its potential in these niche markets by taking a commercial approach.

Ecotourism in Nicaragua

Emerging from years of political turbulence, Nicaragua has recently tapped its potential to become a popular ecotourism destination. With six active volcanoes, the largest area of primary growth rainforest north of the Amazon, and pristine beaches, Nicaragua has much to offer. This is reflected in the growth in the number of tourists from 484,291 in 1998 to 978,330 in 2007 (Instituto Nicaragüense De Turismo). This growth has important implications for job creation and poverty alleviation in Nicaragua. Nicaragua is the third poorest country in the Americas, with 45 percent of the country’s population living on less than $2 a day. Promoting small tourism enterprises in Nicaragua has the potential to encourage further growth of the industry while developing new jobs and income for some of the most remote and impoverished areas of the country.
Ecoquest Travel is a high-end global ecotourism company based in North Carolina. In 2000, its founder Dave Davenport was just starting the business and FEV flew him to the eco-lodge to evaluate its tourism potential. Davenport immediately recognized the unique experience that FEV offered tourists; he saw its natural beauty, combined with the unique cultural connection to the community, as an enormous ecotourism opportunity. Over the next few years, Davenport consulted with FEV on trail design, trained local guides on biology and natural history, developed a bird inventory for FEV, and even brought the first set of binoculars to the lodge. Ecoquest grew as well and currently takes up to three birding groups a year to FEV.

The organic coffee market started emerging in the mid-1990s and was reaching annual growth rates of 12 percent in the early 2000s, and has continued to grow. Within this expanding market the Harkraders approached Peter Giuliano of Counter Culture Coffee (CCC) and introduced him to their product. Counter Culture Coffee, also based in North Carolina, buys coffee from small producers around the world and sells to retailers in the United States. In 2002, Giuliano visited FEV to advise it on how to improve quality. Over the years, CCC has dedicated time and energy in improving the farm's organic farming techniques; this long-term investment has been crucial to the growth and improvement of FEV's coffee production. According to CCC, the quality of FEV's coffee has consistently and significantly improved. FEV now serves as a model organic farm in Nicaragua, demonstrating the value of healthy working conditions and economic and environmental sustainability.

The tourism market is challenging because your product is your service. Therefore the success of continued growth is based on the experiences of your guests. This is increasingly critical with the advent of online forums such as Trip Advisor (www.tripadvisor.com), where anyone can post a rating of your services. This puts increasing pressure and value upon staff to be empowered to provide that extra mile of service, as they are a key element in the future marketing for your organization.

**Value Key Resources—Employment: More than a Job**

Paying relatively high salaries and providing other benefits to employees is consistent with the philosophy of FEV and its mission to promote the social and economic development of San Ramón. However, there is also a business rationale behind this decision—treating workers well allows FEV to attract and retain quality staff members. There is a strong sense of camaraderie and teamwork among employees at Finca Esperanza Verde. The group takes pride in its work and in FEV's reputation both within and outside of Nicaragua.

FEV has 25 (8 men, 17 women) full-time employees in tourism and client services at the eco-lodge. There are two staffing shifts per week; workers stay on the farm during their shifts due to the long distance and difficult road between the lodge and San Ramón. Generally, workers are extremely loyal to FEV and have long tenures at the lodge. Much of this loyalty is a result of how well employees are treated. Full-time employees receive social security and health insurance—unusual in Nicaragua—in addition to competitive salaries well above national averages.

The minimum monthly wage at Finca Esperanza Verde is US$110, with the average FEV wages at about US$135/month. These numbers are well above the alternative salaries for unskilled labor, a category that encompasses most FEV employees. In other jobs, most women would work for US$30–50 per month, and most men would work for US$55–70 per month. Another factor in the FEV package is tips, which are quite rare in Nicaragua. The amount earned on tips varies seasonally, but they usually amount to an additional three or four months’ worth of salary per year.

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This strategy of treating workers well also applies to the other segment of FEV’s business. Finca Esperanza Verde’s organic coffee farm sells 15,000 pounds of coffee per year (12,000 for export and 3,000 for domestic markets). The coffee business supports 10 full-time staff (all male) and up to 30 seasonal employees (mostly women) during the harvest. All workers, including seasonal workers, receive higher salaries than they would on conventional farms.

Lesson: Community Buy-in and Building Social Capital

FEV was created based on a constant and ongoing dialogue between SCSRN and community leaders on the topic of development. One overriding theme that developed from these discussions was the need for area activities that created economic opportunities for the community through direct employment or supporting services/industries. From this theme FEV was born, and community inclusion remains a centerpiece of FEV’s approach. From the start, the eco-lodge was built using local materials and labor, with a shared vision that the lodge would create direct employment, as well as increased economic opportunities for area microenterprises.

To date the model has been successful, with the lodge providing additional income opportunities for local people through supplemental activities—a guesthouse program for visitors to San Ramón and a guide service program run by local youth. In addition, food and other supplies (70 percent of FEV’s expenses) are all procured locally from the community. This leads to a direct economic connection and benefit to the community of San Ramón from the tourists that visit the lodge.

Economic Impact (based on 2007 reporting for the eco-lodge)

Creating Local Microenterprises: Guesthouse Program and Youth Guide Club

As part of SCSRN, a group of ten families provide homestays for FEV tourists that want to spend a few days in San Ramón before or after their visit to the lodge. The host family supplies a bedroom and bathroom for the guests, in addition to preparing and sharing three meals a day. A key feature of the homestay program is directly linking the tourist to members of the community through mealtimes and sharing of the hosts’ home. This program provides extra income for the Nicaraguan families that participate. However, it was found that the majority of guesthouse hosts are involved in the program for the cultural exchange, rather than the additional income.
Another successful community outreach by FEV is a local guide club comprised of about 20 young people, ages 15 through early 20s. When a tour group spends a few days in San Ramón before or after visiting the eco-lodge, a guide from this group shows the tourists around town and accompanies them to activities such as musical performances and other local events. The guide club charges a standard rate of $10 a day per group for a tour; with 5 percent going back in to the club for the guiding supplies and equipment inventory maintained by the club.

Maricela is the president of the guide club in San Ramón. Through her experience as a guide, she became interested in tourism career opportunities. Maricela is a university student studying sustainable tourism with dreams of opening her own travel agency or tour business when she graduates. She would like to open her business close to San Ramón because she sees the ecotourism potential that her hometown has to offer on the international market.

Similar to the guesthouse program, the guide club offers another occasion for cultural exchange and interaction between the people of San Ramón and visiting tourists. This program provides the youth guides with a seasonal part-time job and some extra income. It is also a leadership opportunity and a chance for young people to serve their community and take pride in what San Ramón has to offer.

Supporting Local Vendors

Whenever possible, all inputs for FEV operations are purchased locally—food for the eco-lodge, building materials for infrastructure, etc. This practice allows the lodge to further support the economy of San Ramón. In the first six months of 2008, FEV spent approximately $24,000 locally at supermarkets, gas stations, and fruit and vegetable stands. This amount represents about 70 percent of FEV’s total operational expenses.

Local sourcing gives FEV more control over the quality and price of its inputs and helps to prevent leakages in the supply chain. The further a commodity or supply has to travel to reach its destination, the more likely prices are to increase and profits are to be siphoned away from the community. This practice of sourcing locally promotes FEV’s own sustainability and contributes to a positive economic impact and distribution of benefits for the entire community, beyond FEV employees.

FEV has used its coffee business to effect a similar positive economic impact for local farmers. In 2000 FEV, working with the local coffee cooperative, introduced local farmers to CCC. By eliminating middlemen, CCC was able to offer the farmers significantly higher prices for their product than the $1.55/lb set by local buyers. CCC purchased coffee from the farmers at $1.80/lb (a 16-percent increase) for mixed beans and a premium price of $2.05/lb (a 32-percent increase) for high-quality coffee earning a cupping score of 88 and above.
Lesson: Reinvest in Your Business and Community

Business

Reinvesting in operations for maintenance, marketing, and growth are essential for any business, and there is no exception for a social enterprise. Conducting business in the tourism industry creates a constant need for the upgrading of services and facilities to meet the demands of international tourists. FEV is acutely aware of this and recently upgraded its showers with solar-powered hot water heaters and spend up to $3,000 annually maintaining its vehicle. In addition, the lodge recently invested $7,000 to upgrade the lodge’s septic system and for the construction of sleeping quarters for male staff. As previously stated, a social enterprise is an enterprise first, so continued investments in increasing the services and outreach of the lodge’s business, ensures long-term success in achieving FEV’s social mission of improving the economic and social conditions of the local community.

Community Social Projects

Ten percent of FEV’s profits are reinvested into the community through a donation to SCSRN. SCSRN’s one paid staff member implements community social projects, funded partially by FEV investment and by fundraising efforts of the US-based board of directors. The process begins when a need is identified in one of the rural communities around San Ramón. Local people complete a very simple application form. This form asks for basic information on the project, specific people involved, and key partners. The local Advisory Committee then discusses all proposals at a monthly meeting and ranks them according to priority. Its selections are passed on as recommendations to the US-based board, which ultimately approves all contributions.

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Young children from La Bailadora create artwork in their preschool class. Fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students attend class in La Bailadora.
One important element of these social projects is that there is always some component of “sweat equity,” meaning that the local community must contribute time and energy in exchange for the financial and logistical support provided by FEV and SCSRN. This participatory approach not only lowers costs, but also guarantees sustainability by building on local commitment and ownership to ensure the project’s long-term success.

Lesson: Engage in Win-Win Relationships

The success of FEV and the positive social impacts it has had in San Ramón are based on the active development of win-win relationships by the founders in three areas that were and are critical to its success.

Businesses

The Harkraders identified early on the opportunity and benefit of creating mutually beneficial relationships with international companies. Both FEV and its counterpart businesses receive financial and other benefits from these win-win relationships. After being patient with the product development process, Ecoquest Travel and Counter Culture Coffee now generate revenue for their own companies using FEV’s services and products. The relationships have also yielded some cross-fertilization with CCC annually bringing a group of baristas and coffee shop owners and managers to the eco-lodge to educate them about the coffee production process through hands-on learning.

Although initial contact was made by FEV’s founders, the relationships have endured because the businesses had a long-term vision and were willing to take a risk and experiment with FEV. Both companies invested time and expertise early on and are now reaping the rewards of those efforts. In return, Finca Esperanza Verde is able to offer its products to reliable vendors who pay fair prices.

Staff

Good business practices have clear hierarchy and foster owner/employee or supervisor/subordinate roles; however these roles can be approached by making these relationships positive rather than authoritative or autocratic. FEV places a high value on the overall development of its staff. Investing in training, providing social benefits, and paying salaries above the prevailing rates engraın a sense of pride, self-worth, and value in their jobs. These traits will be felt by customers, adding to their positive experience, and to additional word-of-mouth references. An example of the “win” for FEV is a comment from a recent traveler to FEV from Hudson Valley, New York, who posted the following on Trip Advisor: “The staff at the lodge is exceptionally good—friendly, helpful, knowledgeable, and so much fun.”

Community

Having grown from a community development project, FEV had the advantage of starting with a good relationship with the community. However, keeping to the social mission of FEV, it has successfully created not only high-paying jobs for the community, but aim to foster and support other business (guiding, guesthouses, suppliers, other coffee producers), to expand its positive economic impact. This inclusion of community, and understanding by the community of FEV, benefits the tourists who visit as their experiences will be augmented by this full circle of service from the community and FEV, thus having a positive impact on their travels and FEV’s business.

Challenges

Market constraints are a common challenge facing most new businesses. The Harkraders’ creation of FEV within two fast-growing markets—ecotourism and organic coffee—allowed for constant growth to allow for reinvestment in the company and community. This was augmented by the development of key win-win relationships with Ecoquest Travel, Counter Culture Coffee, and the community of San Ramón. However, there remain challenges for FEV and ecotourism in general.

Infrastructure: Many eco-destinations are purposely off the beaten path. The mountainous rainforest area where FEV is located is no different—a two-and-a-half-hour drive on rough roads from Nicaragua's capital of Managua, tourists arrive a bit jostled. This challenge is addressed by continued community and government involvement in supporting the upgrading of services and infrastructure to support FEV. For immediate concerns (the tourists arriving at the eco-lodge), the setting, facilities, and quality of services of the staff adequately address market concerns with one visitor commenting, “I thought the experience was fabulous. The drive from Managua is a bit rugged, but well worth the jostling.”

Accountability: The quality standards of FEV are not necessarily matched by other service providers locally in San Ramón or in Nicaragua. FEV’s standard of service for its staff and operations is based on the needs and expectations of Western clients. At times this creates a mismatch between FEV’s clients’ needs and expectations and the reality on the ground where service providers such as rental car companies are lax on confirming reservations. In an environment where even the government, which held an event at FEV, is tardy in paying for services, the struggle to improve accepted substandard practices and services is a challenge. Gifford Laube, FEV’s Managing Director, calls it “swimming against the current” as he continues to reach out to service providers—such as car rental companies—on the benefits of increasing standards of service to meet the expectation of international travelers.

Land Use: Ecotourism, defined as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people,” creates value upon land and/or natural resources that before may have been taken for granted, or were misused or mismanaged by the community. This can cause direct land-use conflict (say, with loggers in a rainforest) or property rights issues once the attraction, or land around it, has been developed. Due to FEV’s positive standing within and economic inclusion of the community (homestays, guiding services, seasonal work, etc.) there have been no direct land-use conflicts. The community recognizes the direct financial and social benefits that are derived by the careful, planned development by FEV of ecotourism in their community.

Conclusion

Social enterprises are at the convergence of community development programs with market-based business principles and approaches. Therefore, a balanced approach between the “business” and the “social” worlds needs to be followed. The lessons learned from the Finca Esperanza Verde case study can be best summarized into the following key success factors:

1. Meet market demands. Finca Esperanza Verde meets specific demands in the domestic and international ecotourism markets. Whether appealing to birders or retired adventure travelers, FEV has a product that appeals to customers and prices that those customers find reasonable. It is important to note that the prices still allow FEV to generate enough profit to provide employees with an extremely competitive salary package and invest in social projects.

2. Include the community and get buy-in at all levels. Another factor in FEV’s success is the continuous focus on involving local people and gaining buy-in for all activities. At the municipality level, the SCSRN committee decides which projects to fund in the rural areas around San Ramón. At the most local level, SCSRN works with grassroots leaders in the small villages to determine needs and help design and promote projects. Once a project begins, there is always a condition that the community must contribute time and energy in exchange for the financial and logistical support it is receiving.

3. Cultivate win-win relationships with multiple partners. FEV works with public and private sectors, NGOs, and the community in building its products and increasing its positive impact on the community of San Ramón.

Public Sector: Cooperate with the government, but don’t depend on it. FEV works with the Tourism Institute of Nicaragua to conduct yearly staff trainings, and SCSRN collaborates with the Department of Education when constructing a sister school. However, both FEV and SCSRN are not solely dependent upon national or local government for their activities.

Private Sector: Identify market niches and cultivate win-win relationships with strategic commercial partners, as FEV did with Ecoquest Travel and Counter Culture Coffee.

5. [www.tripadvisor.com](http://www.tripadvisor.com) Comments posted by a traveler from Shepherdstown, West Virginia.
NGO: FEV is working with Rainforest Alliance (another Ecotourism PLP recipient) to certify its practices as environmentally sustainable. Such a certification will lead to additional promotional and marketing opportunities directly through the Rainforest Alliance.

Community: Partner with local people to gain their trust and long-term commitment to the project’s success.

4. Make a positive impact. FEV has very tangible numbers that reveal a significant financial impact in the municipality of San Ramón—employing up to 65 local people at a given time, all paid and treated extremely well relative to alternatives in Nicaragua; purchasing 70 percent of inputs locally, which amounts to approximately $40,000 per year for the local economy; and finally, contributing $32,500 (from 2001–2008) to SCSRN to support education, health, and other projects.

Following the first lesson introduced in this case study—“a social enterprise is an enterprise first”—for an organization or a business to have a positive impact on social goals, it must be self-sufficient and profitable. FEV’s approach of community inclusion through a socially motivated business model does provide the following business returns:

- Salaries: The social benefits, training, and financial rewards to staff create pride, value, and a drive to provide the best services, thus ensuring a growth in your market through word of mouth. These same values lead to dedicated employees and reduced turnover, which reduces the costs for hiring and training new staff.

- Community Investments/Inclusion: The direct impact and social exchanges provide an economic link, understanding, and appreciation by the community for FEV’s operations. This, in a sense, creates an extended staff assisting tourists while they are in town, builds trust, and reduces the need for security and the costs of input due to a shortened supply chain.

Success builds success, especially in ecotourism during a time where being green is being pushed forward as social consciousness and concerns on global warming and environmental issues increase. Successful operations that balance the “business” and “social” worlds will be recognized as Finca Esperanza Verde has been and continues to be.

During the writing of this case study the Rainforest Alliance contacted FEV stating that a media crew would be visiting the eco-lodge on October 8. What they did not tell FEV was that the film crew was from the BBC’s travel program Fast: Track. During its feature interview, BBC’s correspondent Carmen Roberts stated that FEV was “the gold standard in Nicaraguan ecotourism.” FEV may be swimming against the current in Nicaragua, but it is gaining international attention. This recognition leads to increased exposure and free marketing, which leads to increased clients who contribute to the larger social mission of having a positive economic and social impact on the community of San Ramón.