

Personal Statement

As a returning member of Team Monterey, a delegation of the Monterey Institute of International Studies, this trip took on special significance for me and provided a sense of continuity to my educational experience. The grant awarded by JJCF allowed me to return to El Salvador this January to work with the same organization and communities I worked with last year, and to use the skills I have learned over the course of the year to help further their development goals. I returned to El Salvador this year in the role of a student team leader of the Team Monterey Production group to work with the civil society organization Asociación Mangle. During this trip, I was able to employ many of the skills I am learning in my development studies and also to enhance my leadership abilities. Additionally, I was also able to observe the progress of the project I worked with in the previous year and to witness the impact our work has had on the communities in the region of the Bajo Lempa.

During the three weeks we spent on the ground in El Salvador working with Asociación Mangle, the project team I led helped the organization's Agricultural Production Program to design and refine a diagnostic tool that will be used to assess the current state of agricultural productivity of the Bajo Lempa. The diagnostic tool we created will be used to assess the agricultural productive capacity, current practices in use, the sustainability of current practices, and the potential for expansion of agricultural programs in the area. Asociación Mangle will use this information to determine where to expand their programs and what types of efforts are needed in each community. After creating the tool, we held a workshop with the organization's Agricultural Production Program to train the employees how to use and modify the tool, how to enter data, and how to access the results database. We will maintain correspondence with the Agricultural Production Program team to help them refine and finalize the tool in order to ensure that they are able to gather the information they need. Through continued communication we will also work with the Asociación Mangle to identify ways in which the next year's Team Monterey project teams can assist them in their constant efforts to bring sustainable self-sufficiency to the Bajo Lempa.

Thank you for making this opportunity possible for me.

Sincerely,  
Melissa Summers