

## WORKSHOP REPORT

# AGRO-TOURISM IN COLOMBIA

from a phone interview with Margarita Flora Ruiz Soto, workshop co-ordinator



In the small village of Santa Bárbara in the municipality of Tinjacá, Boyacá in Colombia, the First Workshop on Potential Agro-tourism in Farming Systems in Reconversion took place on September 9, 10 and 11.

The workshop, co-ordinated by Margarita Flora Ruiz Soto, focused on a new concept for Colombia called agro-tourism: rather than traditional hotels, tourists stay on farms run by families and enjoy a restful visit while obtaining an integral experience and understanding of life on a farm. The concept is intended to promote tourism in Colombia and aid farmers at the same time.



There were 35 participants in the workshop, 20 of which came from different regions of the country and from various rural sectors and are involved in programs and projects related to sustainable farming production. A farmer and his wife and two daughters hosted the workshop on their family farm - they develop products such as jam, marmalade, artichokes, and olive oil, and sell them in Bogotá in specialty goods stores. This farm is one of the first in which agro-tourism has been experimented and proven successful.

During the workshop, agro-tourism in Italy was referred to as a model, since it has proven hugely successful for the country as well as the 10,500 certified agro-touristic farms that participate in the program. Experiences, programs and agro-tourism in other places were considered in an effort to predict difficulties that may come along and to take the proper steps in making this idea a reality for Colombia. Agro-tourism specifically in Tinjacá was also kept in mind so as to personalize the model and adapt it accordingly for Colombia. The end of the workshop had defined a one-year plan of action. The plan outlines necessary steps that will

have to be taken which include the obtainment of necessary documents, the creation of networks of communication, the definition of which and how many farms will take part in the agro-tourism, and the promotion of agro-tourism in Colombia.

Margarita Flora Ruiz Soto was very pleased with the outcome of the workshop she co-ordinated. In a recent phone interview, the pleasantly spoken lady explained that the participants were "very enthusiastic, everyone had a positive attitude and a lot was learned."

"This is an excellent proposal for Colombia," she explained as she spoke of the politically distressed country with many problems in its own right. Still, Margarita Flora Ruiz Soto remains positive and looks towards the future. "We need to expand this program to the national level," she says.

However, with the outbreaks of violence that occur in Colombia and the current instability of the country, one wonders if Colombia is ready to promote agro-tourism, or tourism in general for that matter.

"The violent conditions obstruct our efforts, but Colombia is ready," responds Margarita Flora Ruiz Soto. "It just needs time."



Margarita Flora Ruiz Soto

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