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BUILDING A BETTER HEMISPHERE SERIES NO. 13

Point Four Brings 4-S to Costa Rica

By

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REPRINTED FROM
JOURNAL OF HOME ECONOMICS
APRIL 1952

A.I.D.
Reference Center
Room 1656 NS

POINT 4 IN ACTION

THE INSTITUTE OF INTER-AMERICAN AFFAIRS

INTER-AMERICAN REGIONAL OFFICE

TECHNICAL COOPERATION ADMINISTRATION



4-S Club exhibit at National Fair in Zarcero, Costa Rica. Items were built, produced or grown by club members under the direction of STICA extension agents.

Point Four Brings 4-S to Costa Rica

CAROLYN L. GAINES

Mrs. Gaines is a home economics writer who has worked for the Borden Company, the Woman's Home Companion, and the Chicago Sun-Times. This article reports her observations of rural home economics in Costa Rica during her husband's recent assignment there.

AMERICAN boys and girls have set a pattern in 4-H Clubs that the youth of Costa Rica is eagerly following. Point Four is making it possible for the mainly agricultural population of this tiny democracy in Central America to help itself. And one of the big phases is the 4-S Club, the local adaption of 4-H.

The Institute of Inter-American Affairs, an agency of the United States government, carries on Point Four activities in Latin America. Three years ago it collaborated with the Ministry of Agriculture and Industry of Costa Rica to set up STICA (Servicio Tecnico Interamericano de Cooperacion Agricola), a service agency for agricultural co-operation. The program started in 1942, with U.S. technical personnel employed to provide our troops in the Canal Zone in neighboring Panama with fruits and vegetables. Now the governments

of both the United States and Costa Rica finance the work, and both Americans and Costa Ricans fill the jobs.

All of Costa Rica is about the size of West Virginia, with a population of somewhat over 800,000; its agriculture has gone the same sleepy way for centuries. Although Costa Rica is close to the equator, the altitude of the central plain where a majority of the population lives makes it pleasantly temperate the year around, with variations of wet and dry seasons. Crops of the country range from the temperate to the tropical. The two most important for export are coffee and bananas.

STICA's headquarters is in San José, the capital and only metropolis. Extension agents have headquarters in some 28 towns, all over the country. Attached to these field offices, in 14 towns at the moment, are a 4-S Club assistant and a home demonstration agent.

The change of letter from H, a silent letter in Spanish, the language of Costa Rica, to S, allows for a translation of the meaning of the name. The head, heart, hands, and health of 4-H become *salud* (health), *saber* (knowledge), *sentimientos* (sentiment), and *servicio* (service) in Spanish.

Actually, 4-S began in 1946 in Costa Rica as a

Young Costa Rican girls working in the Santa Rosa school garden. This garden is used for demonstrations at Santo Domingo de Heredia. With school gardens such as this as an example, the extension agents introduced home vegetable gardens as projects for the boys and girls enrolled in the Costa Rican 4-S Clubs, which are the equivalent of the 4-H Clubs for boys and girls in the United States.





A 4-S member at Concepcion de Santa Ana



4-S Club supervisor at Palmares checking selected corn seed project of club member. Corn interplanted with tobacco. When corn is harvested, it will be sold to farmers for seed.

STICA Agent at Alajuela demonstrates to 4-S Club members how to spray tomato plants and prevent fungus damage.



school activity. Now under each field agent, 4-S and home demonstration work are community projects. In spite of the "non-joining" tradition of the rural population of Costa Rica and a leadership shortage, the movement has spread rapidly. Today there are 105 clubs in action with 2,313 members.

STICA's first problem was the hostility to strangers of the country people, who welcome only intimate friends into their homes. This handicap was overcome with the starter project, the home vegetable garden. The club leader would insist on visiting the home to give first-hand advice on the individual garden. The children would consent to this visit very reluctantly, and even then would carefully skirt the "stranger" around the house to the back area set aside for the garden. Return visits were the same. Then came the break, for the gardens, with selected seed, proper methods, and good care, were successful. The club leaders, now friends, gained entree to the homes for themselves and the other agents.

The importance of the home vegetable garden is stressed for both boys and girls because of the role it can play in improving the food habits of the people. The basic diet of Costa Rica consists of rice, beans, and tortillas made of corn.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations published a "World Food Survey" in 1946 that reported per capita protein consumption of slightly less than 50 grams per day in Costa Rica. Only Java, among some 70 countries surveyed, had a lower per capita protein consumption. According to the same report, the average per capita calorie intake in Costa Rica is just over 2,000 per day.

Even those who can afford other foods continue to subsist mainly on the three basic foods. I lived with a typical middle class family who ate rice, beans, and tortillas daily and added to this white bread, potatoes, and macaroni. A bit of meat appeared once a day and eggs occasionally.

The main accent in the home garden is on green leafy vegetables. Every boy is required to have a garden, and the girls are urged to have one. Many of the girls do have gardens, in spite of Spanish tradition to avoid "dirty hands" tasks.

Home-grown vegetables have universal appeal so that there seems to be no problem getting them from the garden to the table. At least that is true while the novelty still prevails, and STICA hopes habit will then take over. The thrift aspects of the gardens are not wasted upon these families, who have very little cash to spend frivolously.

Getting the people to eat more of the abundant fruits also concerns the home demonstration agents. Oranges, grapefruit, and lemons grow in everyone's

yard, and yet the fruit can often be seen rotting on the ground. Bananas, too, abound, as well as many fruits unknown in the United States.

At one girls' club meeting I attended on a large farm near Grecia, the enterprising local agent prepared a delicious fruit salad of such everyday fruits (for Costa Rica) as fresh pineapple, papaya, and orange for the 25 members present. The attractive servings probably did as much convincing as the little speech telling the importance of eating fruits regularly.

Another home project, the making of jellies and marmalades, utilizes the abundance of fruits and sugar. In some cases the home agents were able to adapt standard recipes, but, in the instances where the fruit is known only locally, new recipes are being developed.

Señora Olga de Ocampo, a former teacher, heads STICA's corps of home demonstration agents. She and the other home demonstrators were given a three months' training course by Mrs. Josefa B. Hardin, a University of Puerto Rico home economist formerly heading the staff.

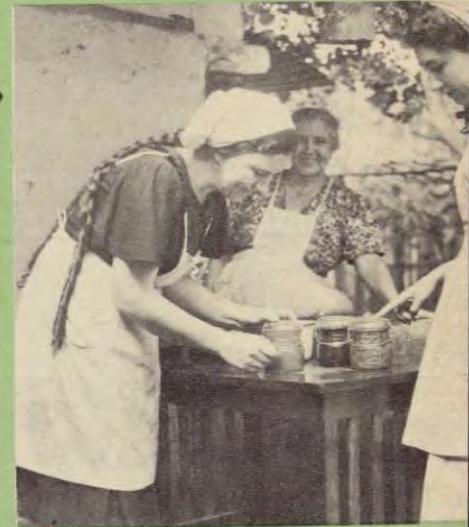
Most of the home demonstration agents have inadequate training by our standards. A few are graduates of the local home economics *colegio* (through junior college). Some are not even secondary school graduates. Because the program is so basic, this does not seem to be an overwhelming handicap at present, and luckily, for there are no trained home economists available for these jobs. Yet Costa Ricans are very proud of their educational system. It is far ahead of most Latin countries. The long-time Costa Rican boast of more school teachers than soldiers is now amplified to more schools than soldiers.

Nevertheless, personnel is the main stumbling block in STICA's rural home economics work. (As the University of Costa Rica has a College of Agriculture, there are qualified young men to fill the jobs of field agents.) There is no local home economics training at the university level. Also, Latin tradition does not approve of young women's leaving home to go to work. This means the women available for field jobs are those living in the various towns. Very few, if any, in these hamlets have minimal qualifications. A workable plan is a husband and wife team to take the club leaderships together, eliminating the chaperon problem. One such team is working successfully in Palmares, and another, now in training, will open a new district, San Ramon. Señor Enrique A. Summers, head of the extension service, is scouring the country for more such teams. New agents train at the central office for a few weeks, then go out into the country for one to two months' work under an



Miss Olga de Ocampo, home demonstration agent, shows a group of 4-S Club members how to make a simple paper plate.

Farm wives and 4-S members learn preserving and canning under supervision of Home Demonstration Assistant. This is a part of the program directed by STICA Agent in the Santa Ana area.



The articles exhibited at the Zarcero 4-S Club fair were made by girl club members and farm wives.





Carts lined up in front of STICA office at Palmares as farmers purchase fertilizer, fungicides and insecticides in accordance with recommendations of their STICA Agents.



4-S member in Palmares receives counsel on soil conservation from Minister of Agriculture (left) and STICA Agent.



4-S Club members spraying tomatoes to control fungus disease. Equipment and know-how furnished by STICA Agents.



A typical meeting of a 4-S Club near Cartago, Costa Rica.

experienced agent.

At the start, emulation of big brother, the 4-H Club in the United States, was almost the undoing of little brother, 4-S Club in Costa Rica. The enthusiastic organizers, gathering together all they had read, seen, or heard about the U. S. clubs, tried to conduct formal meetings, opening with a gavel and adhering to Robert's *Rules of Order*. Not even the Costa Rican legislature uses a gavel. The boys and girls, rather than be caught doing something wrong, avoided meetings. The leaders quickly saw their mistake and dropped the Anglo-Saxon formalities.

The picturesque and often-seen symbol of the Costa Rican countryside is a gayly decorated ox-cart. *La Carreta* (the cart) has a new meaning for 4-S members as the name of their own monthly publication. Each issue features a recipe, inexpensive and nutritious. Señora Ocampo sometimes develops these recipes, but often she just uses a reliable one.

Often, 4-S meetings are held in bare rooms, the local school, or the back room of the STICA office. When and where possible, the meeting adjourns to a home, where there is equipment for real demonstrations of canning, jelly-making, or sewing.

One group I observed, at Santa Ana, was lucky enough to have a small barn for its use. Boys and girls were working with wood. This is an especially poor section, and their households possess few amenities. Some of the boys were turning out straight wooden chairs, to add "luxury" to their homes. The work was done entirely with hand tools, and even these were scarce—the club leaders took them from meeting to meeting as they made the week's rounds in their district. One ambitious boy here hoped to sell a few chairs so that he could buy his own tools. The girls make small wood objects such as standing ash trays, decorative picture frames, plaques, and shelves.

There is no indigenous art in this nation, for in



An exhibit of club products shows the great variety of projects in the program.

the Latin American countries art is always tied in with the Indian population. Costa Rica has hardly any Indians. Handicraft projects therefore use familiar designs from magazines or commercial patterns. Very often, before a fiesta of special importance, everyone who can afford to buy some cloth will put her energies to sewing a new dress.

Embroidery work is very popular and expertly done. It seemed a waste of handwork, at times, to see the poor material which the girls were elaborately embroidering. Yet it is the best they can afford. Crocheting and knitting are also enjoyed. The popular baby booties appeared out of place, since many of the children and their elders wear shoes on Sundays only.

Because the girls are from small towns or the country, 4-S brings new sociability to their lives along with home betterment. At a meeting I attended of a girls' group in Palmares, plans were being made to return the hospitality of a group from the nearby community of Buenos Aires. The day and hour were promptly settled, but what to serve was the question. As coffee and cookies had been served at the first party, it was decided that fruit salad, dressed up, the budget permitting, with sirupy gelatin and ice cream, should be served. The girls made donations, depending upon the fruit in each backyard.

Such seemingly small projects as an embroidered towel or a jar of tomato conserves can serve as starters to effect important changes in the home. Through them the home demonstration agent works at the job of education, technical assistance, and stimulation of interest in better living.

Everyone working for STICA seems to share the same glorious enthusiasm. In methods of work and home living they are bridging a gap of several hundred static years for many people in the country. Their infectious eagerness serves to inspire themselves, the people they are aiding, and those who have a chance to observe this important work for democracy.



Teen-age club members show the late Dr. Henry G. Bennett a table spread made as part of their club work.



More articles exhibited at the Zarcero 4-S Club fair. This was the third fair put on by 4-S Clubs during the year.

Preparing tomatoes for market. Tomatoes were not grown in Palmares for the past 10 years because of insect and fungus damage. 4-S Club boys with STICA's help proved it could be done successfully.





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