

Januray 6, 2009
Bryn and Mathias

Today was our second day on the farm, and we all started in the greenhouse, or the “*casa de cultivo*.” This greenhouse, which can be seen in the background of the picture below, was purchased with a grant from the government to support cooperatives around the country. Unlike greenhouses in the U.S. where they are often used to regulate temperature for crops, the greenhouse we worked in was helpful primarily in keeping pests away from the crops. We used *hazadones* (hoes), *palas* (shovels) y *picos* (picks) to find and pull out large rocks. The rocks would damage the large equipment used to work the soil. After a *descansa*, the group split up and one group went to weed celery plants, while the others stayed in the greenhouse. The fresh air in Las Lajitas was well needed and provided a great break from the structure of Dickinson, and our general indoor lives. Many of us have been relishing the beauty of Venezuela as we sit among trees, weeds, and brush in the middle of green mountains, colorful houses and a perfect breeze.



We spent our days farming on the terraced mountains of Las Lajitas. The size of what surrounded us put our trip, preconceptions, and work in perspective. Lemon trees on either side, and a swift breeze in the air made the work more comfortable as we cleared rows upon rows. The soil that got under our nails and the ache in our backs were concrete symbols of the changes we were achieving.

As the trip goes on, the dynamics of our group continue to change. The group of 13 kids sitting in the Miami airport can't compare to the 13 friends now. Many of us were nervous as we left the country with a group of people we barely knew. However, our first raucous night playing an improvised version of Catch Phrase and the team bonding inspired by a five hour hike provided us with a fast introduction to each other. We are a group made of different grades, social groups, majors and interests, but have found friendship in the dirt of Las Lajitas and the communal living of Campo Campesino.



After a good dinner prepared by Sara and Catarin, we were joined by Luz, Sandino, and Maria. They are part of the Youth Movement in Venezuela, and staunch supporters of Chavez and “*el proceso*.” This movement is called El Frente Miranda and includes youth from across the country that is determined to help carry out Chavez’s Missions. This often means traveling into the rural jungles as they teach people of all ages to read and write, leading rally marches, or even going house to house installing energy-saving light bulbs in every town in Venezuela free of charge. Believing in a higher cause for their actions, thousands of volunteers like Luz, Sandino, and Maria allow the social revolution in Venezuela to continue. Sandino said that El Frente Miranda believed in creating a just and equal world with opportunity for all and that Chavez is the person they believe is best equipped and willing to create this change. This class was one of the most interesting as clapping broke out, tears streamed and hugs were exchanged. We were inspired by Luz, Sandino, and Maria and encouraged to believe that the dedication and passion they showed is possible in other parts of the world, including in the U.S. During the last days we had met a lot of people whose lives had been changed by the Bolivarian revolution. Although most people, that we had met, were in strong support of “the process”, Luz, Sandino, and Maria gave the revolution a personal “face”, different from the well-known image of Hugo Chavez. They do not only believe that a different Venezuela but also a different world as a whole is possible. Their tremendous personal dedication for the project leads us to believe that individuals’ engagement makes all the difference.

