

“Each of us has a personal responsibility to care for creation, this precious gift which God has entrusted to us.”

—Pope Francis

Planting Prosperity

SMALL FARM TREE PLANTING IN NICARAGUA

A CRITICAL PRIORITY TO PROTECT FAMILIES AND THE EARTH, OUR COMMON HOME



Isabel Gutierrez tends to his crops in the shade of large trees in Nicaragua. Photo by Oscar Leiva/Silverlight for CRS

THE POPE’S CALL TO ACTION

In June 2015, Pope Francis issued *Laudato Si’*, his highly anticipated encyclical on the environment. In this pastoral letter, the pope points out that our changing climate creates “one complex crisis that is both social and environmental.”¹ Erratic weather patterns and warming temperatures are diminishing farmers’ ability to grow food for their families and to earn income. Decreasing farmable land and resources are causing violent conflict and mass migration of people to countries with more opportunity. The world as we know it is changing, and threatening the lives, independence and dignity of people. An estimated 3 billion people are at serious risk from the effects of climate change.² Most of them subsist on small-scale farming, and their simple lifestyles have done little to contribute to the problems we now face.

The pope reminds us that “each community can take from the bounty of the Earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the Earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations.” We must be good stewards; we must protect our planet; and our faith calls us to assist those whose lives are threatened by climate change.



Sandra Torres, a single mother, works on a coffee estate to support her 3 children. Photo by Oscar Leiva/Silverlight for CRS

CRS Response

Studies have demonstrated that increasing carbon dioxide levels are directly correlated to increased surface, air and water temperatures.³ Forests are the Earth’s natural sponge to absorb and store carbon dioxide, helping to regulate the climate. Planting trees is one of the easiest and most effective ways to reduce carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

Catholic Relief Services supports hundreds of thousands of small-scale farmers to improve their farms and businesses sustainably. Many of these farmers have the land to plant additional trees, but not the means to invest in seedlings or knowledge about the benefits of planting trees. Additionally, these farmers need income; therefore, short-term profit may take precedence over a longer-term investment like trees.

Catholic Relief Services is seeking to raise \$857,120 to support a unique project to help farmers adapt to a changing world, support their livelihoods and help mitigate climate change. The Planting Prosperity project will create a system for donors to support small-scale farmers by providing incentives to incorporate tree-planting in farming activities and offset the donor’s own carbon footprint. In facing a

¹ Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si’* of the Holy Father Francis on Care for Our Common Home, June 18, 2015, Section 139, p. 104.

² Climate Change and Global Solidarity: Adapting to a Harsher Climate. CRS University. June 25, 2016.

³ A Blanket Around the Earth. NASA. Accessed online October 2016: <http://climate.nasa.gov/causes/>

problem that sometimes feels too big to tackle, Planting Prosperity offers people the opportunity to do something tangible to combat climate change.

Planting Prosperity will not only help mitigate the effects of climate change, it will provide income support for small-scale Nicaraguan farmers through financial incentives to plant trees. The impact will be equivalent to taking nearly 18,000 cars off the road for 1 year. The table below summarizes the projects overall goals:

Planting Prosperity 3-Year Impact	
Acres of land reforested 	741
Beneficiary households 	187.5
Trees planted 	310,110
Tons of CO₂ removed from the atmosphere 	67,821
Equivalent in cars off roads for a year 	17,942
TOTAL COST	\$857,120

CRS Partner

CRS is partnering with Taking Root, a Canada-based organization developing social reforestation projects in collaboration with small-scale farmers in Nicaragua. Taking Root is experienced in ensuring that farmers comply with eligibility and monitoring requirements to quality for carbon offset payments under internationally established standards. Taking Root will administer cash payments in the form of annuities to participating farmers in Nicaragua for a period of 10 years.

Conclusion

Working with our most vulnerable brothers and sisters overseas, we see firsthand the effects of our changing climate on poor and vulnerable families. We are thrilled to introduce the innovative Planting Prosperity project to help mitigate some of these effects, and to protect livelihoods. We hope you will join us in this mission.