The Ocoa Carbon Farming Project

**Summary**

As developing-world farming communities increasingly feel the impact of climate change, local initiatives are springing up that focus on sequestering atmospheric carbon in soil through regenerative organic agriculture. The Ocoa Carbon Farming Project, based in the southwest mountains of the Dominican Republic, is developing an innovative model that links global climate action to urgent quality-of-life issues. In Ocoa, as elsewhere, rural residents are experiencing an accelerating health, economic, and ecological crisis, resulting from the collapse of the predominant, but increasingly dysfunctional, “Green Revolution” chemical farming model. Regenerative organic agriculture could eliminate toxic chemicals and restore ecological balance, as well as address climate change, but requires the development of new farming skills, along with the creation of a substantial regional market for organic produce. But what makes the Ocoa project truly unique in its climate science component. A laboratory will be constructed in the pilot village of Los Martinez to analyze the carbon sequestered in the Project’s soils, providing a rigorous quantitative measure of the project’s sequestration effectiveness for both participants and the world at large.

**Project Components:**

1. **Providing effective access to the skills and resources necessary to make the transition to regenerative organic agriculture.** A highly experienced local organic farmer is working with the pilot village as teacher and consultant. Under his direction, the villagers are preparing an organic community garden as a learning center. As the community’s organic farming skills develop, the country’s leading Permaculture expert will work with the villagers to create a master design that includes commercial-scale organic farms. As the project progresses, other communities will join in, incorporating the pilot experience in Los Martinez.
2. **Developing the market for the organic products as production increases**. We will focus on the nearby provincial capital, Ocoa, population 50,000. Ocoa has great potential as a market, and concern about the health effects of chemical-laden produce is widespread, but organic produce is not currently available there. As part of our campaign to raise awareness about organic produce, we are working with the Ocoa school district to educate high school students about climate change and the Project. We plan to live-stream the Soil Not Oil conference in the high school in September, and to develop associated activities for teachers and students. We are also seeking funds to buy a truck to distribute weekly produce boxes on a subscription basis, as well as sell organic produce in Ocoa’s neighborhoods, as production develops in Los Martinez and other communities.
3. **Providing a clear science-based demonstration of carbon sequestration for addressing climate change**. There is no laboratory in the DR equipped to measure Total Organic Carbon (TOC) in soil, so we will be setting up a lab to do this in Los Martinez. We have currently raised $3000 towards the $4500 purchase of a used TOC analyzer for $4500. Total cost of the laboratory will be about $ 50,000, and local residents will be trained to do the sampling and analysis.
4. **Encouraging replication by bringing national and international participants to the pilot project in Los Martinez**, This will require the construction of dormitory facilities in the existing ecotourism center, as well as outreach in the United States and other countries.

**About CAREL**

CAREL is a Dominican non-profit corporation started in the mid-1990’s as a collaborative effort between US appropriate technology activists and Dominican rural communities seeking innovative, workable development solutions. CAREL quickly became a national leader in participatory, community based and owned micro-hydroelectric systems, directly leading to the construction of some 47 (and counting) off-grid electric systems that now serve over 15,000 rural people. CAREL also offers expertise in rural wireless Internet access and operates a training center in its base village of El Limon. CAREL serves rural communities around the Dominican Republic, particularly in the Ocoa region. The communities are generally semi-isolated and are economically very marginal.

CAREL is a small, informal, and agile organization, and works in tight coordination with community leadership in each individual project. The communities themselves make project decisions through their established processes.

CAREL has worked extensively with the UNDP Small Grants Program, and received funding from the InterAmerican Foundation and Organization of American States, among other institutions. In the Ocoa Carbon Farming Project we are currently working with the Farmers’ Association of Los Martinez, the Ocoa School District, and the Gaia Dominicana Permaculture Network.

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