



SOCIETY OF JESUS AGRICULTURAL AND SOCIAL INSTITUTE (SOJASI)
P.O. Kurseong - 734 203 Distt. Darjeeling. INDIA

December 2010

PEACE !!



JOY !!



LOVE !!



Dear Friends,

I've decided, since Ceci is now the Captain of the good ship, SOJASI, she should write the Monthly Letter. Now I'm more or less just a stowaway, who sneaks up on deck now and then to see how things are going. And now they are going swimmingly! Thanks so much for keeping our SOJASI ship afloat.

Yours in Him, Fr A S.J.



Dear Friends:

PEACE!

JOY!

LOVE!

When I look back I think we were very lucky to be Fr Abraham's students in SAS Poultry in his Work Scholarship program and then in SASAC in his extended family at Woodcot. In the SAS Poultry, we learned practical maths, science, accountancy and management. We learned to work with our hands, heads and hearts. We learned to work in groups as teams. The older children taught the younger ones. It was all very beautiful. We didn't want to miss a single day. When Fr Abe built SAS and started the Head Start School at Edelweiss, he said he would give "The best education he could to the poorest children he could find." And now I can say we are the lucky ones among thousands, who got that Best Education from him. Now it is time and a good opportunity for us to put that "Best Education" we got from Fr Abraham into practice at SOJASI. And we give a big thank you to Fr Abe from the bottom of our hearts for all his love, efforts, headaches and heartaches for making us what we are today. And we equally give thanks to our friends on the other side of the globe who supported Fr Abe in his effort to give 'The best education he could to the poorest children he could find'.

I think Christmas is the best time to share with you what we are doing at SOJASI at present. I have prepared our activity report for our SOJASI Management Meeting. I think this report will tell you everything about our work. We have just started and are carrying on our work – one step at a time. We are happy that SOJASI has started as a small seed and hope in time it will give much

fruit to the poor. It is good news. But we will need your support and prayers to nurture SOJASI. I have full faith and hope that you will support us to keep SOJASI alive as you have supported Fr Abe in his work to give the best education to the poorest children. Now here I will end and say as Tiny Tim would say: "God bless us everyone!" and Merry Christmas to all.

With love and prayers,

Cecilia

SOJASI ACTIVITY REPORT (FROM JUNE 1ST TO NOVEMBER 2010)

A) TREE PLANTING:

We decided during the rainy season—mostly during June and July, to plant at SOJASI as many as possible of fruit/ vegetable/fodder/and flowering trees so that our property will be protected from land erosion; vegetables will get needed moisture and shade during the hot summer and we will get some income from vegetables and fruit products. Eventually with many flowering trees, SOJASI will look beautiful.

The land just below the SOJASI building is bare and a landslide-prone area. So we have planted 100 'nurcut' (fodder grass) cuttings and 25 'aroocha' (plum trees) cuttings around that area.

During last April-May 2010, I noticed that the square meter gardening area was exposed to too much sun. The April-May sun dried the vegetables right down to their roots. Local tomato-tree saplings, sown in February, were ready to be transplanted. So we planted one hundred tomato-tree saplings all around the square meter gardening area. In two years time they will provide needed shade and moisture to the vegetable crops during the hot season. Besides, these trees also give fruit products which are very popular with our local people.

Visitors like Fr. Lisbert D'Souza, Assistant to the Fr. General in Rome, Father Abraham's cousin Mrs. Kathy Martin, and SOJASI friends: Canadians, Rob Swan and Scott Herrington, (teaching in Saudi Arabia), and his two sons, Briton, Chris Bake, (working in Dubai), and his two children and an Australian Rob Swan, planted eleven flowering trees as memorial trees.

B) TRAINING IN THE SQUARE METER GARDENING METHOD:

On the 9th of July 2010, we organized a one-day spot-training session in Square Meter Vegetable Gardening for a group of twenty-five men and women farmers from Sikkim. They were brought by their leader, Mr. Madan Tamang of Surya Farmers Club, South Sikkim. Even though it was a foggy and rainy day, the farmers were keen to sow vegetable seeds with the help of our sowing plates. It was altogether a new system for them. Sowing plates give different vegetables the exact space they need and no more. By using sowing plates they also save seeds which are quite expensive and sometimes hard to get easily. The other thing they liked about our method of gardening is the use of plastic coverings over the beds. Plastic coverings protect the beds from excess rainwater, cold weather and frost which kills seedlings and vegetables. So with the plastic covers, farmers can grow vegetables 12 months of the year and not only for 5 or 6 months. This session ended successfully with a group discussion and cups of hot tea.



C) RE-ORGANIZATION/RE-ALLOCATION/REPAIRS OF SQUARE METER BEDS:

The square meter vegetable beds were repaired and reorganized. There are three blocks of beds. Two SOJASI staff members and two trainee/workers worked in each.

Block I - 311 beds

Block II - 316 beds

Block III - 312 beds

One SOJASI staff member and two trainee/workers worked in Greenhouse A, the seedling house. It has 118 beds.

Also eight of the SOJASI staff members take care of 84 beds by themselves.

We found that 77 beds were unusable.

Total usable beds: 1314

Total beds sown: 1023 (77.85%)

251 beds are allocated for seeds and other crops which are new.

45 beds for seeds

70 beds for squash

55 beds for ginger

27 for turmeric

54 beds for tree nursery



MARKETING REPORT: (Mrs. Sabita Luth/Mr. Lalchand Routh)

We were able to have some vegetable sales June to November

D) MUSHROOM REPORT: (Mr. Lalchand Routh/Mrs.Dimple Biswakarma)

We could not get mushroom spawn in June/July and August. We used to get spawn sent to Kurseong by our old supplier in Jalpaiguri. Because of the frequent strikes during those months, he stopped sending spawn to Kurseong. In September we went to Jalpaiguri and got a batch of 150 spawn but they were not that good. Now the old supplier has big customers in Bangladesh, Sikkim etc. We lost 103 cylinders due to green fungus (bad spawn). Now we have found another local supplier who makes spawn in Siliguri and brings them to Kurseong. We now are trying his spawn. Because of the cold weather now and being out of step because of the unavailability of spawn, we have less production compared to the production during April to May this year.



E) COMPOST REPORT: (Mrs. Saraswati Bhitrikoti/Mr. Rajesh Pradhan)

Trainee-Workers: Saroj Biswakarma /Amber Biswakarma

During June to August this year we could not make compost piles properly because there was no roof on the compost shed to prevent them from being ruined by the rain. Now, we have made 15 piles of compost, and we have put the compost on the square meter beds. Some amount of compost was washed away. We have to find out how much compost will be produced from a pile of 5ft/5ft/5ft and how many ingredients are needed for a pile of that size and how long will it take the

piles to “cook the ingredients”. To make compost we need equipment like bamboos, hollow blocks, and good compost thermometers.

F) REPAIRS/CONSTRUCTIONS: (Mr Rajesh Pradhan/Mr.Niraj Das)

Helper – Suman Tamang

June: All five door posts in the ground floor were fixed. Plywood was fixed under the second-floor roof.

July: Two class rooms were made out of a big open room just outside the mushroom production room on the second floor. Door posts and windows were fixed in the wall between the two classrooms so the inner room would have good light..

August: Just near the upstairs staircase, a room was constructed for a store room. Outside toilets were repaired.

September: Two door posts were fixed in the upstairs hall. SMVG beds/drains/fencing were repaired and cleaning was done.

October-November: The Compost shed was repaired and cleaned. The roof work on the shed has just started.

Carpentry Work: Altogether out of the fourteen wooden doors of SOJASI Training Center, nine doors have been made. Five more doors have to be made. The carpenter will come next week and do the rest.



G) NOTE:

1. During this monsoon to protect our vegetables from the very high winds at SOJASI, we have planted white flowering climbing creepers along the fencing of the SOJASI property. Previously old plastic sheets were used as wind breakers on the fencing. Our main goal is to make SOJASI as eco-friendly as possible.

2. Talking about eco-friendliness, when our friends, Scott Herrington, Chris Bake and Rob Swan visited SOJASI in November 13th, they were very impressed by our mushroom production room. We

told them that mushroom production is much less now because of the low temperatures. Then they talked about the possibility of using renewable energy like solar energy. So Chris Bake and Rob Swan have promised solar paneling for SOJASI. Rob Swan was the first man to walk to the South and North Poles! Before making his trip, Rob lived in his eco-friendly ship heated by solar energy. He will bring experts to check out the possibility of our using solar energy during the sunny winter months.

We have had much good news to make in this report because God has blessed us all!