

Reflecting on Puente

Before arriving at Puente as the Development Director, I had never visited a rural Mexican community. I knew nothing about amaranth or the challenges facing Mexican subsistence farmers. During my first visit to one of the villages where Puente worked, I was told to arrive to the office by 6:30 AM. We drove about three hours (one of those on a bumpy dirt road!) to the village of San Antonino el Alto and arrived in time to begin the 10:00AM workshop. This was the daily work schedule for many of my coworkers in the field.

As the women villagers arrived to the room, I heard chatter in their indigenous tongue and felt a few curious sets of eyes glance over at me. My coworker started the workshop by explaining the three main food groups necessary for a balanced diet and how amaranth fits into each group. At the end, my coworker asked the participants if they regularly cooked amaranth. One of the mothers responded that she had been adding amaranth to her family's atole in the mornings and that her children liked it. This prompted another woman to share how she had added amaranth to her underweight son's morning atole and that he had already gained a kilogram. After this remark, all of the women started talking to each other and seemed to be in agreement about amaranth's benefits for their malnourished children.

Impressive. I thought to myself, Puente is actually making a difference. For the first time, I witnessed how amaranth is improving families' health in the community. I recalled all of the statistics I had read about the poor health status of rural Oaxacans and extremely low income levels of Oaxacan farmers. When I arrived in Oaxaca as a consultant, I thought that amaranth sounded too good to be true. But, after seeing these women's enthusiasm and hearing the success they had with amaranth, I instantly became a believer.

After many more trips to Puente's communities and witnessing numerous participant testimonials, I am even more convinced that amaranth is a viable solution to many health problems of rural people around the world. As my time in Oaxaca comes to an end, I reflect on that first visit to a rural village. I know I will always remain a committed supporter of Puente's work, not because of the many friendships I have made, nor because of the long hours I spent helping to move the organization forward, but I will remain a supporter because I believe in amaranth.

By Lisa Thompson, Former Development Director