

TCD Practitioner Grant Report: The Real Thesis Defense: Returning Research Results to Farmers in Esparza, Costa Rica

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I spent two weeks in Costa Rica in June 2013 to pursue two primary objectives: to return the results of my graduate research to the participants and informants of said research in Esparza; and to share the results of my graduate research with the academic community through a presentation at the ATBC/OTS 2013 conference in San José.

The first week of the trip was dedicated to the first objective. I worked closely with the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG) extension agents to plan an interactive presentation for farmers in the area that had served as research participants the previous summer. With the help of MAG, the presentation was hosted on June 23, 2013 and was attended by 20 of the 48 participants. The hour-long session included the following components: welcoming refreshments; an interactive presentation; and concluding discussions. The second week of the trip was dedicated to the second objective. I presented research from my master's thesis on Wednesday, June 26 in an oral session at the annual ATBC/OTS conference in San Jose. The session was entitled "Conservation Strategies" and attended by a minimum of 50 conference attendees.

The results of my trip were positive for both me and those with whom I reconnected and presented my research. My return to Esparza was an opportunity to reconnect with the professional contacts that had aided my research the previous summer. It also served as experience in planning and executing an interactive presentation within a defined community. This experience was also beneficial to Esparza in that the research results that I developed in my master's work were refined by the participants and community members so that they will more accurately reflect the context and subject in the future. Participants of the Esparza presentation were eager to engage in the discussion of my research and even used it as point from which to engage in new discussions about conservation and payments for environmental services. In this way, my presentation served as an inclusive mechanism as well as a conversation starter for other subjects related or more relevant in the current context.

My presentation at the ATBC/OTS annual conference served as a beneficial opportunity to gain experience in synthesizing and presenting large amounts of research in front of a scientific audience. The 15-minute oral presentation was well received and served as a conversation starter for ecologists and biologists about the human-level effects of payments for environmental services. My presence at the ATBC/OTS conference thus served as professional development (for me personally) and an opportunity to help shed light on the human dimensions of conservation strategies that are often problematic.

