

## Agri-Argentina

*A case of into the unknown, a mystery and an adventure. In a brief two weeks overseas; Argentina, its agriculture and attitudes towards sustainability were laid bare. Holly Garrod (Dereham YFC) and James Grant (Terrington YFC) discovered Argentinian beliefs, attitudes and developments in what is classed as (despite appearances), a third world country.*

Following 15 hours of air travel, Córdoba and 25°C were a welcome reward. The sky was clear, the air warm and the soil golden brown, winter in Argentina. One of the country's driest regions, Córdoba and central Argentina exist within a 3-hour drive of some of the most fertile lands to the East, and further afield the harsh landscapes of the Andes mountain range embracing its western Chilean border and Bolivia to the north.

In Córdoba we worked with an impoverished school located in one of the city's ghettos, to cultivate a vegetable garden for the students in order to develop key skills in learning how to grow, harvest and then cook their own food; as a part of the curriculum. Whilst working in the garden it became very apparent as to why the school had enlisted the support of volunteers to carry out the work during their winter. Heavy clay land in an English summer has zilch durability comparable to Argentinian soil! Before leaving the school we decorated small boards with planted vegetables, these would be put on display for all to view as a reminder of what they could expect to pull up in the spring. The time spent in the school showed how important it is for young people to receive an education in agriculture early on, even if very basic!

As part of our extra activities during the first week we travelled by bus to visit a small organic plot on the city's outskirts, led by Christian; a one man digging machine. Christian's focus on organic farming came from a want to develop herbal and 'clean' remedies for health and treating disease, and cancers, within his family. The small plot of land had been developed on zero inputs other than additional water kept stored in a rubber reservoir during the winter months.

On our weekend off we had the opportunity to be proper tourists and get out to see some of the local sights. It had been a busy week. We loaded into the minibus for a two hour drive out to Alta Gracia to visit the childhood home of Che Guevara which has been developed into a museum commemorating his life as a child and then as a revolutionary, his travels across South America, the USA and further afield. The museum certainly cemented the free-spirited natures of Argentinians in our minds and gave us all an insight into the troubled times through which South America has risen.

As if there wasn't enough venture for one weekend, the Sunday took a more sustainable turn with a visit to Las Sierras Chicas de Córdoba, an hour from the city; to be hosted by Salvador Gimenez and his team for traditional Argentinian Asado, and adventures on the Sierras. Salvador showed us around his site, expressing his love for the area and his animals; before introducing us to a sustainable building project using plastic bottles to build walls in affordable housing. The day concluded with a trip to find the cattle on the sierras and observe the breath-taking landscape, a very much enjoyed visit.

The second week of our adventure was by far the coldest, most terrifying and utterly fantastic week of the two. Unlike in Córdoba, a shared hostel was on offer with no lock on the door and within 100m of the puma enclosure. It was certainly an experience. Pumakawa itself, an animal reserve charity receiving no government funding, working with troubled/problem animals also focuses on sustainable practices and ensuring nothing is wasted. Alongside this the reserve aims to repopulate the local area, Villa Rumipal with native flora and fauna. As part of this we undertook native tree planting with the local council along the roadside, the project itself was key to ensuring that there are suitable habitats for the bird population which had been on the decline since the redevelopment of the local shoreline airport.

Argentina was an incredible experience, it gave us the opportunity to discover new skills, make new friends and visit a whole new side of agriculture. The YFC Travel Programme is released every September, so don't forget to enquire and apply! It's something that everybody needs to get involved with, you never know where it may take you!

Holly x



