

Nourishing: MANI IV

There's not much that gets down here to the Frontera. The two to four hour drive, depending on where in the Frontera, over narrow, unpaved, roads, winding across mountain passages along 1500 foot sheer drops, simply does not encourage a great deal of transport or commerce. The four foot deep, three feet wide pot holes where rain water streams through like downspouts are equally uninviting to wheeled travel experiences. There are only 70,000 people living in this extremely challenging topography, so most commercial businesses simply shrug their shoulders in a 'why bother' attitude. But, if you have great marketing prowess, perhaps managing to get a large percentage of that 70,000 to regularly purchase your product, then the profit, despite the hassle, might be worth it. It is obvious that one such business enterprise has figured it out. They are called *churros*, snack packaged chips, and they are as ubiquitous here as the ants that stream in and out of our house. They make their way down here in little trucks, about the size and style of a medium U-Haul van. Like the ants, every day they teem into the various municipalities and deliver humongous clear plastic bags, eight feet tall, filled with every type of crunchy, curly, spicy chip and nacho imaginable. The product, readied for purchase, is extremely small, about a third of the size of what we're accustomed to as a small snack size bag of potato chips. It costs about 5 lempira, or 22 cents, such that anyone can afford it, and almost everyone seems to purchase it, especially poor people.



Chispuditos Delivery Stalled

They taste good, and they stave off hunger. Unfortunately, they have substantially no nutritional value. While 22 cents doesn't seem that much to give your kid who says he's hungry, or to get you by because there was no opportunity for a meal, it quickly bores into your income. With earnings of only a dollar or two per day, that 22 cents is a substantial portion of your earnings. But nutritious food is hardly available, the trucks not making it down. Nutritious food is, in a sense, much more expensive, or to say it more correctly, unattainable given limited income. But, the *churros* taste good and satisfy hunger, at least for a brief time. But undernutrition and malnutrition are rampant here. Children don't grow at normal rates, become susceptible to all sorts of diseases, and have shorter lifespans. The *churros* just don't cut it nutritionally, and yet they manage to get down here.



Transferring the Chispuditos

Now, personally I don't have anything against a potato chip. There is something eden-like about a bag of Ruffles, a bottle of cola, a sofa, and maybe a sports game on the television. But I can afford it, and I'm munching on my chips as a pleasurable indulgence rather than staving off my hunger. I would soon become indignant if all I had to eat were potato chips. But, here on the Frontera, families are not as spoiled as I am. They take what they can get.

Shoulder to Shoulder is doing its best to combat the effects of insufficient nutrition. In partnering with the Mathile Institute, we have just begun the implementation of MANI IV (Mejorando La Alimentación de los Niños de Intibucá). The nutritional supplement program is aimed at over 2800 children between six months and six years of age in over 100 communities. They will be given the nutritional enriched product Chispuditos. Their health statistics will then be monitored over the course of fourteen months to discern the effectiveness of the product. With that information in hand, Mathile and Shoulder to Shoulder will consider the next steps at reducing child morbidity rates by improving nutrition. The Chispuditos have arrived on the Frontera, but unlike the *churros*, they had a struggle getting here.



Registering for MANI Hemoglobin Test

Chispuditos is produced in Guatemala. To get it to Honduras, we have to pay taxes and fees for the border crossing. We applied for a waiver, or at least a reduction, but as all things Honduran, it got weighed down in bureaucratic red tape. At the final hour for delivery, Shoulder to Shoulder and the mayors of Intibucá agreed to split the substantial import costs. But then there was the problem of transport itself. The product was being delivered in a tractor trailer. From Tegucigalpa to La Esperanza there would be no issues, but how would it get down to Concepción where it would be stored in large container bins? The truck attempted the journey. It took a whole day of travel only to cover a few

hundred miles. Less than a mile outside of Concepción, the truck traveling up a steep incline among hairpin curves was stymied. It could travel no further. The driver called those who were waiting at our clinic, to tell them he could not travel further. They called out the cavalry. A smaller transport truck went down and the product was transferred from the large trailer onto the smaller transport vehicle. Fifty pound bag after fifty pound bag, in three trips, the product finally arrived. The next step will be to move the product from Concepción to the municipalities, and finally to the families who will receive it.



So why is it easier to provide a cheap product that fails to provide nutrition than one of high value that promises to overcome the plight of undernutrition? Why is it easier to exploit people's sparse resources by selling them something that only pretends to satisfy hunger than to provide them with a source of nutrition to overcome their illnesses? Why do we always seem to defer to money making interests over a compassionate response to need? We don't know the answers to these questions, and although at times this state of affairs enrages me, in the end it is just the way things are. So *churros* will continue to make it down here with ease, reaping in a fortune 22 cents at a time. We will have to fight harder so there is an alternative. We will work hard to overcome the injustice of undernutrition.



We are doing all we can to nourish the people of Intibucá.