

—❤️ Promoting health through vegetable gardens

Supporting Agroecology-Agroforestry



Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Paul Rule Story



Volunteers during Pre-Service Training in Tumbaco

I arrived in Quito on May 2014 to commence Pre-Service Training (PST) as part of OMN 112. Alexis Vaughn was the Country Director. I lived with a host family in Tumbaco. Early during my stay, I got altitude sickness and I had to miss some training. My family supported me while I recovered with a steady diet of banana and kiwi. Back then, the training center was in "Campo Alegre," a rural community outside of Tumbaco. I have fond memories of walking el Chaquiñán to and from training. (Old training center pictured below).

I was a Community Health volunteer, and my training prepared me for nutrition and hygiene education in schools. My site was a rural community named Colimes in Guayas.

During my service, I realized the best way to ensure nutritious diets was to grow and consume fruits and vegetables from organic family gardens. These gardens needed to be viewed as a benefit, not a burden to the families.

Growing food in a limited area with an abundance of trees, led me to implement agroforestry projects in my site. By utilizing herbs like mint, basil, cilantro, thyme and trees as natural fences to repel pests, farmers gained dual benefits because they sold the herbs in the market to generate income. In Colimes, my gardening work led to three family-run gardens that provided food and income for the family. I also worked with my Program Manager and Training Specialist, Rebecca Carofilis and Freddy Valero, to create an updated agroforestry manual for future volunteers. During my stay in Ecuador, agroforestry and agroecology became my passions.

In 2016, Ecuador suffered a terrible earthquake. I will always remember the aftermath and loss. These past few years after the earthquake have tested our resilience and resolve. Many of the farms I worked on have had to pause operations or disappear altogether. I know that the communities I worked with will rebuild and find a way forward.