

LEON, NICARAGUA

Sustenance farmer Juan Pichardo, 68, in a field of his corn near the town of El Jicaral in Nicaragua's León state. As with rice in Asia and wheat in the Middle East, corn made civilisation possible in Mesoamerica and is still a vital element of life in Nicaragua's countryside. Most families farm small plots of corn whose harvests, after being dried and stored, feed them for the rest of the year.

Juan has planted corn in this mountainous region of northwestern Nicaragua since he was a boy. He still works six days a week. Born around 20 miles away, he has worked his current plot for 45 years. Every day during the year's two planting seasons – May-July and August-October – he makes the 30-minute climb up a steep hillside to tend to his crop, which yields enough corn for him to sell part of his harvest for cash. He also grows beans, which he plants once a year, and raises a few cattle.

Three of Juan's sons and five of his grandchildren live with him and his wife, but many of his relatives have emigrated to Costa Rica, Spain or the United States. In 2006, an electricity supply was installed in his home, and since then he has also added a latrine and a well. Although illiterate, he has a rich knowledge of the names and life-cycles of around 100 different trees and shrubs in his area.

Photographer

RICHARD LEONARDI

