

Tuesday, February 13, 2018

Today we rode up and down mountains on bad roads to meet Senia Briceno, an environmental activist working for clean water in the province of Limon, on the Atlantic side of Costa Rica. She left her truck parked along our route and rode in the bus with us so she could explain the situation more fully. Pineapple is the largest export of Costa Rica, and their biggest customer is the USA. Pineapple is a bromeliad and grows well without water or nutrients. Del Monte drained hundreds of acres of rain forest and then clear-cut it in order to plant their crop. To double the yield they spray the plants with chemicals that are toxic. These toxins have gotten into the soil and polluted the water supply for all the 1,500 residents of Milano. In addition, after two yields, the plants are sprayed again and burned. This sends toxic gasses into the air for miles. We toured the plantation and then met with Senia and the board of Acueducto Milano who explained to us that water has to be carried by truck into Milano twice a week for drinking and cooking. The families are still have to bathe in the polluted water. The Acueducto Milano is trying to lay a small pipeline from a clean-water creek several miles away to their town, but right-of-way has been a challenge. The group is gathering data on suspicious deaths and chronic illnesses that have become more prevalent in the area in the ten years since the plantation started up. They have approached the leaders at the plant, leaders at Del Monte, as well as local and state government. They have led boycotts and blockades to make people more aware of the problems of this small town. Senia and all of her board members are strictly volunteer; UBL is helping them organize and get the word out.