



P O S T A   P A R A   P L A N T A S

## Plant Health Clinic *and* Pharmacy

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TIRAQUE, COCHABAMBA, BOLIVIA

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This photo-essay demonstrates the rapid progress being made by PROINPA in creating a new forum for exchange of information about plant health problems. The concept of *Posta para Plantas* is borrowed from human health but is unique in its application to crops. Farmers attending the market in Tiraque are now aware of a new source of advice on plant diseases and how to control them, as shown vividly in this brief account. The power of the *Posta* lies in its simplicity but it only works when the 'plant doctors' know the farmers and the problems that they face. Held weekly, the *Posta* is part of the Plant Health Services Initiative. See the Global Plant Clinic website for further information or through local contacts.

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[www.globalplantclinic.org](http://www.globalplantclinic.org)

The Global Plant Clinic is part of CABI *Bioscience* and funded by DFID. It provides an expert service from the UK, free of charge, for diagnosing all plant diseases. Within Bolivia it has established the Plant Health Services Initiative to improve delivery and access to advice and support in controlling plant diseases, particularly amongst the poorest farmers.

## O v e r v i e w

The plant health clinic in Tiraque has made several innovations since it began in September 2003. Perhaps the most interesting is that they now work with a plant ‘pharmacy.’

I was impressed by all of the innovations PROINPA has added: getting the *Posta* added formally in the mayor’s annual plan, the large cloth banner, and especially the cooperating pharmacy next door.

They are planning other innovations, like working with schools, more radio spots and a TV to draw people in. They also plan to do follow up work with farmers who have consulted them, and to start working with schools.

The initial number of visitors might appear somewhat low but these are still early days with a very new concept. PROINPA agronomists feel that the numbers may pick up as the main potato season gets into full swing. Also, PROINPA is taking steps to draw larger crowds. Still, we need to keep thinking about ways of increasing the numbers of farmers served.

If I could make one suggestion, it would be to write out more complete recommendations. Some of the recommendations are a bit complicated. Especially when recommending two fungicides, it is important to write out clearly when to use the one, and when to use the other.

These are minor details in a clear success story. PROINPA is doing **a great job** with this innovative extension method. They are applying it creatively, and are committed to making a success of the first *Posta* in Tiraque.

Nombre de la persona atendida	Su lugar de origen	Cultivo	Descripción de su problema	Acciones tomadas
Diego C. Castro	Castaño	Cebolla	Mancha blanca en la hoja	

### Taking a case history

Keeping accurate records is an important part of monitoring the type of assistance that farmers ask for. This is one of several forms designed by PROINPA to collect data.

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## 1. Tiraque Market comes alive

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### Things to sell

LEFT: Today the market is thronging with people selling their harvest of mishka (early season) potatoes.

BELOW: A small-scale pesticide dealer waits patiently for the farmers to finish selling.



### Things to buy

After they have sold their potatoes or broad beans, farmers can choose from a wide variety of goods, not all of which is hardcore utilitarian stuff. Here a woman sells q'owa, traditional incense burned as an offering to the Pacha Mama, or Earth Mother.

### Exports from Tiraque

Retailing cut flowers. Even more flowers are sold wholesale from Tiraque, and trucked to Santa Cruz.



## 2. Setting up the Posta

### Getting Started

The Plant Clinic runs from about 10 AM to noon. René Pereira, head of Proinpa's experimental station at Toralapa, sits under a banner announcing the 'Posta para Plantas'. He is surrounded by two boards, covered in colourful posters. Note the plant 'pharmacy', a table with bottles of agrochemicals, to the right of the posta.



The *Posta para Plantas* tries to fit into a similar slot as retail sales. After farmers have sold their goods, they may be in the mood to consult an agronomist about plant health.



### New business 1

Zenón Centeno (left), of the agrochemical company Agripac has come to the fair for 3 weeks running, and set up a plant 'pharmacy' next to the *Posta*. Proinpa sought this arrangement, because of Agripac's reputation as a responsible business. Some other dealers sell adulterated or out-of-date products.

### New business 2

Moveable pesticide shops set up near the *Posta*. The dealers set up a table at the rear of their truck, showing pesticides and chemical fertilizers.



### 3. The first consultation

Mr Osío describes the disease as ‘yuraj manchas’ (white spots), suddenly covering his onions, but he has not brought in a sample.

Agronomist Pereira prescribes the fungicide Benomil or Benlate, until the disease is cured; then apply the preventative fungicide Bravo and then goes next door to the pharmacy see if they have it. They don’t, but they have A Priori, which has the same active ingredients.

#### What’s wrong?

A farmer, Olegario Osio, (r) from the neighbouring municipality of Colomi, looks on while Mr Pereira writes him a prescription for an onion disease.



#### Giving advice

An important part of the public service (besides verbal recommendations in fluent Quechua) is filling out a ‘prescription’ for farmers, indicating what they should do for the plant health problem.



#### The prescription

This includes a brief description of the crop. The ‘symptoms’ on the far right mention the white spots, as described by Mr Osío. Mr Pereira thinks the disease is *Peronospora*, which he lists in the top, right-hand line. Proinpa keeps a carbon copy of the prescription.

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## 4. The Posta becomes part of Tiraque

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WHILE WE WAIT for more people to come, we talk about the clinic. Mr Pereira says that the mayor's office has written the plant clinic into their annual operating plan, and that they are offering them free radio spots. PROINPA wants to use more radio spots, to advertise the clinic, and they want to bring a TV and show videos, to attract more people.



**Problem with potato**  
Onofrio Alméndrez describes potato late blight. Agronomist Pereira gives him a written prescription, telling him to apply Ridomil (fungicide) mixed with foliar fertilizer.

WHAT ABOUT SAMPLES? Few people bring in samples. Most describe symptoms, although PROINPA agronomists always encourage them to bring samples. In fact, they have only once taken a sample to the lab. That was one time when a person brought in a reddish potato, which Mr Pereira took to the lab to test for disease. The serological tests were negative, and he suggested that the symptoms were due to excess water. The people did come back the following week and got their diagnosis.



**A satisfied customer**  
Luciano Villarroel also discusses potato late blight with René, who prescribes him Bravo and Ridomil. The man asks if he has to buy them at Agripac next door. René says no, he can buy them anywhere he wants to. Like all the other members of the public we have met today, the man seems pleased as he walks off.

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## 5. At the end of the day

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### Solid progress

Four farmers came to the *posta* in two hours. Next door, Agripac drew a lot of people, although not all of them bought things. (Some leave saying things like "I'll think about it." Or, "I'll ask my wife.")

FOLLOWING THROUGH: Mr Pereira also wants to go to the field, to visit some of the people they have talked to at the fair, to document the results of the *Posta*.

MORE INNOVATIONS: PROINPA also plans to start working with five schools, for two hours a week, as an innovation in extension, teaching plant health to school children, who will be farmers in a few years.

### *Using Postas to provide other information and advice*



### My fields are too wet – what should I do?

One man comes up and asks what to do about the waterlogged fields. (It has been a very wet rainy season). René suggests that he could dig drainage ditches.

Then the man looks at this pamphlet (shown on the left) which describes a potato storage silo. René explains that it is a double purpose silo. Seed potatoes go on the top shelf, where more light enters, and ware potatoes on the bottom, where it is darker. The man seems interested, but hints that the silo is expensive to build.

René suggests that he make it with a cheaper roof instead of with ferro-cement, and the man takes a pamphlet with him.