

California Veterinary Medical Association Member Profile
Dr. Myriam Kaplan-Pasternak
Lucky to be in Haiti

By Phil Boerner

There is nothing ordinary about Dr. Myriam Kaplan-Pasternak's veterinary work. She has always loved traveling and has been helping with several international agricultural development projects in recent years. When she's not at the rabbit ranch she co-owns with her husband in the hills of Marin County, the 1990 UC Davis veterinary school graduate can often be found in Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.

A 2010 recipient of the Presidential Volunteer Service Award, Dr. Kaplan-Pasternak has travelled to Haiti with the Partners of the Americas Farmer to Farmer program (funded by USAID) 11 times and returned twice by herself. She was there in January 2010 when the massive earthquake destroyed everything around them. "It was a frightening and challenging experience. As a veterinarian, I was the only trained medical personnel around for miles. In some ways being a food animal vet left me better prepared to deal with the 100 children we rescued out of the collapsed school that night, as we had no equipment, blankets or water."

In the Peace Corps after her undergraduate studies at UC Davis, Dr. Kaplan-Pasternak spent two years in Niger, West Africa. She was living in a rural Sub-Saharan village, without electricity or running water in the poorest country in the world. Her job was in human health/nutrition and she was responsible for 5,000 villagers and 7,000 refugees. Dr. Kaplan-Pasternak learned that animal agriculture is the foundation of the economy of the world's poorest people and most of them have no access to veterinary care. Veterinarians have the opportunity to have a huge impact on poverty and hunger, she realized, and she enrolled in veterinary school.

Dr. Kaplan-Pasternak and her colleagues with Makouti Agro Enterprises in Haiti tackle huge problems, from finding funding to helping improve rabbit meat production, importing equipment, surviving disasters, and making it all sustainable. She knows that to achieve their goals, it takes a long term commitment. Through Farmer to Farmer, Haitians have improved many income-generating opportunities with bees, goats, sheep, wool, and most recently with coffee. Because of this work, parents can afford to send their kids to school, get medical care when needed, and feed their children in a sustainable manner. The animals have become healthier and happier too. In the last 2½ years rabbits have netted an estimated \$200,000 in profits for their owners who are participating in the Makouti program.

"I most enjoy meeting other veterinarians like myself who are committed to improving both human and animal health and welfare under some of the most difficult conditions," says Dr. Kaplan-Pasternak, when asked about her work. "Helping them with continuing education, food safety, and animal management is exciting. They are creating job opportunities and expanding animal agriculture, but even more importantly they are reducing diseases that can impact us all globally."

Once her children are out of high school, Dr. Kaplan-Pasternak hopes to work in Haiti more regularly and on larger-scale projects. "Working in Haiti is my passion and hobby," she says. "It combines my love of travelling, working with animals, experiencing new cultures and a slower pace of life. After a long hot day dodging anthrax and cholera, teaching under a tree, and bouncing over potholes, I really enjoy a shower, a cold clean glass of water and a good book with friends. I am a very lucky person."