

A family's success

Four brothers find new life in tomato farming

LA LIMA, Honduras — In Intibucá, one of the poorest regions of Honduras, four brothers and their families were trying to make their way by farming tomatoes, but the bills they took out to pay for their homes and crops started to pile up and the situation was dire. The family decided that Simeon Vásquez, the second oldest brother, would have to illegally enter the US to make money to send home. The other brothers were going to cut their losses, sell their farms and find a new place to live and earn a living.

Right before they were bankrupt, Simeon and the youngest brother Danilo, joined Fintrac's Rural Economic Diversification (RED) program as lead clients and started getting help from program technician Luis Torres who advised them to install drip irrigation and fertigation systems and raised beds. The two other brothers, Cristobal and Pedro, joined the program as beneficiary farmers and also applied the program's recommendations.

Almost immediately, the brothers noticed improvements in their tomato plants. Danilo's yields and harvests were outstanding. His yields increased 845 percent and his sales increased from \$947 in 2006 to \$10,263 in 2007. His crop was so successful he was able to clear his debts and expand his drip irrigation system, which was initially donated by the program.

Simeon's yields during his first harvest have been high quality and are earning him more than ever. He is now earning \$9 per 25-pound crate, while others in the area are only earning \$4.20. He is currently in the middle of his first harvest and has also noticed how much longer the harvest season lasts now. Before he had to work harder because his plants had diseases, forcing him to harvest everything in one month. With calendarized production and better pest and disease management, he started harvesting this crop cycle on June 6 and was still harvesting in mid-September.

"It's incredible to see the difference of how it has changed," Simeon said.

The other brothers are also happy with the assistance. I used to cut coffee for others, now I believe in growing for myself," Cristobal said. "Two years ago we were living in misery. I hope that in two years there will be even more improvement."

RED is a three-year program designed to significantly increase rural incomes and employment opportunities throughout Honduras. It is providing support to 742 lead clients and more than 10,000 beneficiaries. By July 2008, the program expects to generate \$30 million in new sales by lead clients alone.



Photos by Fintrac Inc.

Four brothers: Danilo, left, Cristobal, Simeon, and Pedro.



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— Simeon Vásquez, tomato grower in Intibucá



Simeon shows off his tomatoes. At right, Fintrac agronomist Luis Torres shows Simeon how to prune to fight disease.