



SUCCESS STORY

Starting from scratch, farmer finds passion in agriculture



Photos by Fintrac Inc.

Passion fruit ready for harvest.



Ernesto Milla surveys his passion fruit farm in Tonacatepeque, San Salvador.

Ernesto Milla grows passion fruit on what was once abandoned land in Tonacatepeque, San Salvador.

Milla originally studied animal husbandry in college, but when he saw that his friend, a USAID-ADP client, had success with passion fruit, a novel crop to the area, Milla recognized a great opportunity and took it. He started farming in October 2007.

The Agricultural Diversification Program (USAID-ADP) helped Milla start from zero. He rented 0.7 hectares of land from his mother-in-law and invested in a drip irrigation system. USAID-ADP helped Milla obtain a variety of passion fruit that is excellent for making juice.

“It was really difficult,” Milla said, recounting his first few months as a farmer. Milla credits the program for teaching him skills in safe pesticide management, fertigation, pest and disease monitoring, as well as daily pruning, which is critical for ensuring yearlong passion fruit production.

“We got a lot of help to begin growing this crop, learning from when the plant was small, to knowing what the plant needs and how to combat pests.”

His product sells quickly and he says demand is much more than what he can provide. He sells his passion fruit to the biggest fruit and vegetable market in El Salvador. Milla has made \$37,129 on his passion fruit crop to date, while incurring \$11,265 in production costs. The net income of \$25,864 was a 230 percent return on his investment.

“We have a lot of potential,” Milla said. “We have bountiful land. The soil is very good here. I would like to plant five, six or ten times more than what I have here.”

The increased production has allowed Milla to hire five permanent employees. These farm jobs give local residents opportunities near their home instead of having to look for work in the city.

“They work all day now,” Milla said. “I pay them a little more and they are very content. We are practically like a family now.”

“We farmers really need to open ourselves to try new things.”
– Ernesto Milla, passion fruit producer