



## SUCCESS STORY

### Watermelon farmer's income jumps 250 percent with assistance



A man measures soil humidity in the watermelon field.



A fully established field of watermelons.



Watermelons after harvest.

Photos by Fintrac, Inc.

For many years, Antonio Hernandez Quinteros, a farmer from the town of Miralville in the county of Acajutla, Sonsonate, rented a small parcel of land before every rainy season so that he could earn money growing watermelons.

Quinteros planted his watermelons in April to fully capitalize on the rainy season. But rainfall in April can be infrequent and undependable, requiring Quinteros to hire extra labor to water individual plants by hand. The added labor increased Quinteros' cost per unit, limiting his ability to expand watermelon production.

Quinteros' inexperience caused other problems. In soil preparation for planting, he only made one pass with his plow and he never created raised beds. The distance he set between plants was also incorrect. These mistakes limited productivity and increased the chance of disease. Without technical assistance, his farm would never be sustainable.

When Quinteros established contact with an extension agent of USAID's Agricultural Diversification Program (ADP), he had recently lost 0.7 hectares of watermelons to an outbreak of two different viruses.

USAID-ADP extension agents helped Quinteros make a plan to avoid future losses and start on the path toward success:

- Identify and purchase land with its own source of water.
- Properly prepare and till the soil and create raised beds.
- Establish a cultivation and nutrition plan, based on his land's specific requirements.

Quinteros followed all of USAID-ADP's recommendations and his productivity quickly increased. Using a hybrid watermelon called Perola, the first harvest on his new property was outstanding. He harvested 84,845 kilograms per hectare, 75 percent more than average yields of 48,000 for producers in the area.

Since June 2006, Quinteros has sown three different watermelon crops in the same time that he would have planted just one before becoming a USAID-ADP client. He now has another watermelon variety under production (hybrid Micky Lee) and plans to continue growing three crops per year through careful planning and better cultivation techniques. Now, with an average annual income that has jumped from \$2,500 to \$8,900, Quinteros is finally getting a glimpse of his full potential as a watermelon farmer.

USAID-ADP, which started in June 2006, is a three-year project that increases sales and rural incomes, generates employment, improves farming and food safety practices and boosts Salvadoran exports. The program also links farmers to processors, supermarket chains, importers, and other marketing agents, strengthening the commercial sustainability of El Salvador's agribusiness value-chain.