



## SUCCESS STORY

### Woman builds successful tomato operation from scratch



Photos by Fintrac Inc.

Carmen Vásquez builds a greenhouse on her farm.



A worker harvests tomatoes.



Carmen Vásquez manages the postharvest packaging.

Fed up with running a teak wood business that only generated \$1,100 per month and determined to start a successful business in horticulture, Carmen Vásquez de Cartagena decided to launch a new career in horticulture.

Vásquez watched closely as neighboring farmers working with USAID’s Agricultural Diversification Program (ADP) built greenhouses and had success. She contacted USAID-ADP, which took her on as a client, and in July 2007 she set out on a new path backed by USAID-ADP’s expertise in agriculture and her own energy.

“Success begins by putting your all into the activities you’re doing,” Vásquez said.

She started with an area of 0.06 hectares on her farm in La Palma, Chalatenango, where she built her first greenhouse with a co-financing agreement with USAID-ADP.

“It was a new opportunity to succeed,” she said.

With hands-on training, USAID-ADP taught her how to “calendarize” tomato production to ensure a steady supply and how to maximize production with drip irrigation and proper pruning and growing techniques.

As the tomatoes started coming in, Vásquez set out to explore potential markets to find a steady buyer. She took samples door-to-door to supermarkets and restaurants and eventually landed a deal with a grocery store chain.

She started delivering about 15 crates of tomatoes two or three times a month. Demand continued to grow, which spurred her to organize production among 15 other producers in the region.

She also worked to help sell her product and add value by improving the presentation. As a result, demand continued to grow and Vásquez partnered with another USAID-ADP client producer in the area, Nuario Adber Vásquez. The two producers coordinated production to ensure a steady supply. With the profits she made from her first greenhouse, she built another greenhouse, the same size as the first.

With a greater supply and continued increases in demand, she is now selling about 30 to 40 crates two times per week, generating an average monthly income of \$2,300.

The demand for her high-quality tomatoes led her to invest \$2,114 in machinery and materials for packaging. She has also hired and trained 12 women for the packing process.

Vásquez plans to diversify and expand by installing drip irrigation on 1.05 hectares for calendarized production of broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, and romaine lettuce. These products have ready markets and she has already established contacts with supermarkets. After the expansion, she estimates another \$1,600 a month. Since starting with USAID-ADP, she is already making 100 percent more than she was making just a year ago and has become a role model in the region.

USAID-ADP, which started in June 2006 and uses funding from the American people, is a three-year project that increases sales and rural incomes, generates employment, improves farming and food safety practices and boosts Salvadoran exports.