



SUCCESS STORY

Horticultural programs at Escuela Agrícola Pompilio Ortega (EAPO) become sustainable with USAID-RED assistance

The Rural Economic Diversification (RED) program, financed by USAID, is an initiative by the American people to increase incomes and generate employment in the rural zones of Honduras. To meet this goal, the project has established strategic alliances with several agricultural institutions. To date, the program has trained around three thousand students in basic production and marketing principles.

One of the institutions that has made the most of this alliance has been EAPO. The school, located in Macuelizo, Santa Bárbara, opened in 1989 as an initiative of Comité de Desarrollo de los Valles (CODEVALLE) and since then it has been known to be at the forefront of agricultural education in the country. In mid-2002, the school approached the Agribusiness Development Center (CDA/Fintrac) with the objective of beginning to implement the good agricultural practices that the program was promoting.

Now the school continues to work with the USAID-RED project. Carlos Chavarría, the head of the horticultural department, explained that in the past the school used traditional practices, they didn't have a formal plan for crops and the plantings were done in mini-lots. The assistance provided by the project to their technicians has helped them make substantial changes that range from the use of new technology to good crop management which lead to better yields and incomes. The positive impact has been felt by the students through theoretical and practical education. Chavarría explained that the school has also benefited from the donation of equipment such as a bedmaker and subsoiler, as well as irrigation systems, fertilizers, agrochemicals and other agricultural accessories that have helped expand the school's agricultural department. In 2002, the department of agriculture did not exist and in 2007, it is a sustainable department with a good physical structure, defined planting programs and the appropriate technology that helps the students enter the work force better prepared.

The field days that take place at the school's model farm serve as a guide and example for farmers in the region. "We want to help eliminate the idea that agriculture is not good and we want people to stop being afraid of investing in agriculture, when you make up your mind you can achieve anything," said Carlos Chavarría.



Photos by Fintrac Inc.

Field Trimmer donated by USAID-RED



Peppers in trays



USAID-RED has achieved the following objectives through its alliance with the schools:

- Increased the availability of trained agricultural technicians. 1,000 students have graduated with agricultural technician degrees from EAPO.
- Trained the professors at the institutions to make the program sustainable. At EAPO, three professors have been trained in good agricultural practices.
- Provided training and continuing education to neighboring producers in updated technologies. Since the alliance was first established, an average of five trainings and eight field days per year has taken place at EAPO with an average of 15 people attending each event.
- Trained graduates (interns) from the institutions through internships supervised by USAID-RED technicians. According to Chavarría, this is a brilliant initiative that prepares graduates for the work force. At the moment, the program is working with the third intern from EAPO.
- Increased the school's income by providing them with the tools to produce high quality crops that meet market demands. According to Chavarría, the school's income in 2002 was \$600 and increased to \$25,000 in 2007. This not only made the department sustainable, but provides finance for other departments at the school.
- Involved input and equipment providers in activities with educational institutions. USAID-RED has promoted collaborations between EAPO and eight input and equipment providers. The Department of Agriculture has also become involved with school and other NGO activities.



Field day at EAPO, Chavarría is giving a talk

“The success of the project depends on permanent technical and financial assistance and in the personnel’s dedication, knowledge and availability. Due to the school’s experience, I have become an independent producer of Nathaly pepper with excellent results.”

— Carlos Chavarría, Head of Horticulture

EAPO, through its agricultural programs, provides the local market with products such as peppers, cucumber, cassava, watermelon, pickling cucumber, tomato, plantain, corn, pineapple and cabbage. The school has also become a source of jobs for the region.