



SUCCESS STORY

USAID melon trial generates jobs, profits for Honduran exporter

USAID's Rural Economic Diversification (RED) program provides technical assistance for field trials before introducing new crops. In mid-2007, USAID-RED, in collaboration with Exportadora Suazo Alcerro (EXPOSUAL), planted 1.2 hectares of bitter melons under good crop management practices. The field trial produced average yields of 131,250 pounds per hectare, significantly more than the zone's average of 30,000 pounds.

EXPOSUAL made additional sales of \$25,000 with the bitter melon trials. According to Selvin Alcerro, co-owner of the exporting company, the high yields were because of the techniques introduced by a USAID-RED technician, which included good soil preparation, precise plant density, continuous weed control, correct use of fertilizers and agrochemicals, and improved harvest and postharvest handling techniques. EXPOSUAL's system is now being demonstrated during field training events as one of the program's model farms to promote these improved production practices and new technologies. In 2007, 140 people were trained during five field days, two on sweet potatoes and three on bitter melons. Topics included fertigation, good agricultural practices (GAPs), integrated pest management (IPM) and harvest and postharvest techniques.

EXPOSUAL, located in Valle de Comayagua, just 54 miles from the capital city, started as a horticultural product company. It is now a business that handles a million dollars yearly in export sales of cucumbers, sweet potatoes, squash, eggplants and bitter melons for US and Canadian markets, as well as onions for the local market. This production activity has also generated more than 150 jobs during the export season.

USAID's Rural Economic Diversification (RED) program, financed by USAID, is an initiative of the American people to increase incomes and generate employment in rural Honduras.



Photos by Fintrac Inc.

A woman packs bitter melons for export.



Area farmers attend a field training at EXPOSUAL.