



## SUCCESS STORY

### Farmer finds new approach to farming at 76 years old

Don Julián Mejía, a Honduran producer from Ajuterique in Comayagua, desperately needed to try a new approach to farming. At 76 years old, he wasn't making enough from low-value crops such as beans and corn. His production costs were high and the labor was too intensive for a man of his age. He needed a plan.

"I heard talk that there was a good project in the region providing technical assistance in agriculture," Mejía said. I got in touch with the agricultural technician in the zone and we discussed the right work plan for me to follow."

Mejía joined USAID's Rural Economic Diversification (RED) program in early 2007. The project identified squash as a good crop to start with because it would generate more income on less land than crops he previously planted so he wouldn't have to cover as much land. USAID-RED also identified a buyer. Many farmers in Honduras simply don't know if they will be able to sell their crops and for farmers like Mejía, the loss of an entire harvest would be devastating. Mejía weighed his options, spoke with other USAID-RED farmers and decided to plant 0.35 hectares.

"This time I used the technologies encouraged by USAID-RED," Mejía said.

The project trained him in drip irrigation, weeding, soil preparation and many other modern techniques to improve production. Mejía managed his new crop exactly as the project advised and his yields were impressive — 25,400 pounds of squash. That is equivalent to 72,500 pounds per hectare, a yield significantly higher than other farmers in the central region. Mejía earned \$2,400 for the squash he harvested. USAID-RED also helped Mejía improve his corn yields 115 percent to help feed his family of six. With the improvements in production and new crops he is now getting ahead, instead of just getting by.

With the advice from USAID-RED, he invested \$1,400 back into his farm. He bought an irrigation system to improve production further. He also used the profits to diversify. He planted bitter melon, which he is cultivating with the same care and guidance from USAID-RED.

Many Honduran farmers like Mejía live in poverty and find that as they age it becomes even harder to maintain traditional agriculture production systems. Mejía, like many other USAID-RED farmers, are finding that improved agricultural production and marketing assistance are crucial in transitioning from subsistence to commercial farming.

USAID-RED, a program designed to significantly increase rural incomes and employment opportunities throughout Honduras, is implemented with help from the American people. It focuses on expanded production and sales of high-value and added-value agricultural products.



Photo by Fintrac Inc.  
USAID-RED technician Oscar Ordoñez advises farmer Don Julian Mejía, 76.

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**— USAID-RED farmer Don Julián Mejía**