

HOME IS WHERE THE FARM IS

Hondurans who emigrated to the United States are coming back to their families and starting new enterprises, and Fintrac is there to help.

LA LIMA, Honduras — Six years ago, Rogelio Ayala, a farmer in Santa Cruz del Potrero, Olancho, left Honduras and traveled for 22 days in the hope of finding work in the United States.

"I didn't have anything here," Ayala said. "I couldn't find work." He took buses and cars through El Salvador, Guatemala and Mexico and tried to cross illegally into the United States at the Arizona border. He failed and was jailed for two weeks. When he got out, he tried again and walked for three days through the desert and made it to Phoenix. He bounced around to Las Vegas, New Orleans and Miami before settling down in Orlando, Florida where he found steady, but "exhausting" work in construction.

For six years, he worked six days a week, saving as much as he could. He was doing well but wanted to return to his home. "I missed my mother a lot," he said. One day he woke up with severe stomach pains. He said he couldn't afford the hospital bills without losing his savings, so, he decided to come home. After taking care of his stomach problem, which turned out to be severe gastritis, Ayala decided to buy 15.4 hectares with the money he earned in the US. For two years he grew corn and watermelons with traditional methods but only earned \$2,105 annually from watermelons and very little from corn.

"I was a blind person when it came to agriculture and now I'm learning a lot," Ayala said.

He started to change his approach after becoming a lead client in Fintrac's USAID-

SEE AYALA NEXT PAGE



Photo by Fintrac Inc.

Rogelio Ayala lived illegally in the US for six years and started farming when he came back to Honduras.

***"I didn't have anything here.
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— Rogelio Ayala, farmer in Olancho.

AYALA CONTINUED

funded Rural Economic Diversification (RED) project. Fintrac technician Rony Alvarez helped Ayala diversify his farm by adding eggplants and bell peppers and updating his production system to include raised beds, drip irrigation and calendarization. When Ayala harvests this year, his eggplant and bell peppers will earn him \$7,105. He also expects more than \$4,000 from onion sales after he transplants.

According to the Honduran Administration of Migration, 18,941 Hondurans were deported from the US in 2005 and 24,643 were deported in 2006. In 2007, even more Honduran deportations are expected.

The US Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency estimates that 70 percent of the roughly 1 million Hondurans in the US are living there illegally and about 90,000 Hondurans attempt to cross the US border illegally each year.

Money sent directly to Honduran families from relatives working in the US, both legally and illegally, provides nearly one-third of the national income — \$2.3 billion in 2006.

Many of these immigrants, including Ayala, are from poor, remote areas where jobs are hard to come by. Fintrac specifically targets these areas to create opportunities for when these Hondurans come home.

Fintrac RED is a three-year program designed to significantly increase rural incomes and employment opportunities in Honduras. It is providing support to 742 lead clients and more than 10,000 beneficiaries. By July 2008, RED expects to generate \$30 million in new sales by lead clients.

DIFFICULT DECISIONS

Mauricio Rios, El Negrito, Yoro

Mauricio Rios took out a \$3,150 loan from a nonprofit organization to get his farm going. After he invested the money into corn, beans and plantains the nonprofit analyzed his progress and it was clear that he wouldn't be able to repay the loan with his projected yields. Rios almost left to start over in the US.

Rios approached Fintrac in a last-ditch effort to save the farm. The project determined that he could increase plantain yields with improved growing practices.

"[Fintrac] came right on time because I was getting ready to abandon the farm and head to the US," Rios said.

He actually earned \$4,736 for plantains and an additional \$3,894 from seedlings. He was able to repay the loan and is now seeking a \$10,000 loan to expand.

Mercedes Vasquez, Yamaranguila, Intibuca

Vasquez co-signed a \$5,200 loan to help out his brother. His brother didn't pay and Vasquez was left with the debt.

He had no choice but to leave his wife and two daughters and try and make money in the US to repay the loan. His journey took 45 days on buses, trains and "I walked for days."

He eventually made it and found work landscaping in Pennsylvania. He earned enough money to repay the loan and then started saving money to come home. After two years, he made it home with enough money to establish a farm. He got connected to Fintrac through a partnership with FHIA.

"I have my wife and kids and the farm, I'm not planning to go back to the US," Vasquez said. He is growing peaches, carrots, lettuce, beets and broccoli and he credits



Mauricio Rios, El Negrito, Yoro



Rony Villatoro, El Negrito, Yoro

the program's technical assistance and marketing support with helping him earn \$3,157 in only nine months this year.

Rony Villatoro, El Negrito, Yoro

At 21 years old, Rony Villatoro couldn't find work in Honduras and set out to illegally enter the US. He was caught and sent back to Honduras.

The failed attempt cost him \$1,000 and was a wake up call. He realized he needed to get something started on his own and he set his sights on farming plantains after hearing about Fintrac's RED program. His older brother, Elder Villatoro, has been living in the US for 11 years and wants to come home. He's given Rony \$3,000 to jumpstart the farm. "All of that money goes into the field," Rony said.

He has invested in a drip irrigation system and built a well and is growing plantains with Fintrac's help. His plan is to get the farm going and have a business set up for when his brother comes home.