



**WINROCK**  
INTERNATIONAL

## Creating Higher Incomes Through Crop Diversity

# Creating Higher Incomes Through Crop Diversity

Throughout much of Central America, rural communities have suffered greatly in recent years from the worldwide collapse in the price of coffee. Long heavily dependent on this single crop, small farmers have seen their incomes decrease so greatly that they can't buy even the basic necessities of life for their families. Adjusted for inflation, the worldwide wholesale price of coffee today is lower than it has been in a century.



Winrock International addresses this issue by helping farmers move away from their traditional reliance on a single crop. Using funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development, and in cooperation with Florida International University, the Winrock-led Farmer-to-Farmer program has sent dozens of volunteer agricultural experts from the United States to Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. In these countries, volunteers work with local farmers and organizations to introduce new methods that will help increase rural family income and economic growth. This may entail better farming techniques, higher-value crops, better marketing skills or the formation of cooperative associations.

In 2005 in the eastern El Salvador province of Morazán, Martin Connaughton worked with a local vegetable farmers' association to train members in drip irrigation techniques and greenhouse design for the production of high-value vegetables and flowers. A nurseryman from New Mexico, Connaughton, was able to achieve remarkable results in his visit to El Salvador by sharing his skills and experience.

Using simple, inexpensive, locally available materials, Connaughton showed farmers in Morazán how to build an 860-square-foot greenhouse for tomato plants for the equivalent of \$270, including drip irrigation equipment. The producers then had to buy plastic bags, soil and seedlings, bringing the total cost to around \$450. This is little more than one-tenth the cost of the greenhouses that the farmers had previously been constructing.

Now the greenhouse industry is beginning to explode. Presently there are 17 greenhouses across the country, which are now being built with better materials that last longer at a cost of \$1,500. Cooperative Chaguite reports earnings of \$25,200 per year with two greenhouses; two more are being built. Buenavista Coffee Mill reports \$50,000 per year in one greenhouse, and by the end of 2008, Buenavista will operate a total of five greenhouses.

**Enterprise & Agriculture:**  
Volunteer Technical Assistance

**Countries:**  
El Salvador,  
Guatemala, Honduras,  
Nicaragua, Peru

**Funding:**  
U.S. Agency for  
International Development

Elsewhere in Central America, Farmer-to-Farmer volunteers have assisted in the production of peppers, onions, strawberries, zucchini, peas, pineapples and dairy products, as well as improved, higher-value varieties of coffee.

Rebecca Silva, a volunteer consultant from California, worked with a farmers' cooperative in Nicaragua on subjects including market analysis, negotiating, accounting and business planning—areas in which they were lacking skills and experience.



“The cooperative members are excellent producers and terrible business people,” Silva says. “For the majority of the cooperatives, the tendency is to produce without consideration of market demand or customer needs. They also have serious negotiation problems and will often accept the price that the client offers without negotiation, due to their desperation to make a sale. I could see the light bulb going on over some of their heads as we discussed these issues.”

Silva also worked with the National Agricultural Technology Institute to develop and conduct improved programs in the business aspects of agriculture. “Those who participated in the training sessions seemed very excited to obtain these new tools and to follow up on the lessons learned,” she says. “I could see a shift in attitude from only focusing on technical aspects of assistance, and almost an inspiration to turn more towards the business aspects.”



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