



USAID | HONDURAS

FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Honduran Woman Farmer Breaks Stereotype

Making a living by running a farm full time was not exactly what Clementina Fernández had in mind for her future. But she did hope that someday she would work some of the land she owned in northern Honduras.

After she made contact with a technician from USAID's Rural Economic Diversification (RED) program, "someday" came sooner than anticipated. RED provided the technical assistance she needed to begin growing manioc, sweet potatoes, and plantains on her property.

Fernández, who had been studying business administration, is considered a risk-taking entrepreneur in an agri-business environment that is usually hostile to women. Most agriculture in Honduras is managed by men.

"In the beginning my friends and family told me I was crazy for doing this, but I can't see myself doing anything else," Fernández said.

RED is a four-year initiative to increase incomes and employment in rural communities in Honduras. The focus is on growing and nurturing micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises by expanding their local sales, exports, and investments. This includes all aspects of

agricultural production – from plant propagation to irrigation equipment to processing plants.



Photo: USAID/H. Medrano

"In the beginning my friends and family told me I was crazy for doing this, but I can't see myself doing anything else"
Clementina Fernandez

Fernandez said she is enthusiastic about running a farm despite an initial harvest that was less than stellar. Due to adverse weather conditions, she barely met her manioc and sweet potato production targets. However, she did succeed in paying off a \$1,900 loan and now owns a drip irrigation system for cultivating plantains.

She said the manioc and sweet potato harvests will improve – and she is diversifying just in case they don't. With the assistance provided by USAID/RED, Fernández is now breeding more than 1,700 plantain seedlings that she expects to cultivate and harvest in one year to make a profit of approximately \$3,500 – three times the annual minimum wage.

She's also overcome other obstacles with atypical solutions. The shortage of male employees – many rural men have migrated to the United States in search of work – has not become a problem for Fernández. She said she prefers to employ women because they are more efficient in performing agricultural work than men: they follow directions better, are sensitive to detail in pruning and harvesting, and are more disciplined.

The upshot is that her entrepreneurial efforts are helping poor women and families with stable employment at a time when women are, more often than not, the heads of their households.

Fernández also shares employees, agricultural inputs, equipment, and her expertise with the other producers in the area on an informal basis.