



600% Income Increase with Crop Diversification

Challenge

Marta Galeas and her family in the valley of Jesus de Otoro have grown corn all their life. Marta normally planted one acre of corn for household consumption. She sold any leftover corn at the market making a total profit of \$160 per season. Galeas used traditional techniques to plant her corn and felt her yield was too low. She lives in fertile valley, where further down the road, big landowners have one of the largest yields of rice in the region. She was sure she could improve her yields and livelihood, if she only knew how.

Galeas, like many other women in the area, had been looking for alternate ways to increase her family's income. She had joined the regional women's cooperative and had tried planting sweet potatoes as well as corn. She had some success with sweet potatoes, but had not increased her net profit to a significantly.



Marta Galeas and project staff talking about the irrigation system donated by USAID/RED

Initiative

The USAID Rural Economic Diversification Program (USAID-RED) offered Galeas the opportunity to switch from corn production to plantains. Plantains are not traditionally grown in Jesus de Otoro, and Galeas was hesitant to do the change. USAID-RED provided the plantlets or corms, technical assistance, and a small irrigation system. Galeas took a chance and replaced her corn field with 3,200 plantain plantlets.

Her first challenge was preparing the soil. Unlike corn, plantains need soil beds so water can easily drain from the plant. Galeas's soil was hard and she did not progress much doing the labor by hand. The program brought in a special bed making machine from Copan (in western Honduras). With the machine, it took Galeas seven days to prepare the soil and begin the planting process. The second challenge was getting a loan approved to buy fertilizers and other supplies. Galeas went to the project's financial institution, and to the women's cooperative in the area. She was approved for a \$600 loan.



Marta Galeas's Plantain Farm

Result

Galeas's crop has grown in size and has begun to produce seedlings. She has invested about \$500.00 to date and expects to produce about 80,000 pounds of plantains. Her farm is a model farm where other people receive training. Conservative estimates predict she will earn \$10,000 from this crop. She can make an additional \$5,000 if she chooses to sell her seedlings. Galeas's life has been transformed. She went from being a traditional corn farmer with food security issues, to a plantain grower who employs nine people, eight of which are family members.

Galeas has already secured a buyer in the area, who is capable of purchasing her entire production. She plans to expand next year's crop. She is actively recruiting people in her community to help them diversify their own production. Her goal is to have enough plantain growers to begin a cooperative and sell at the regional level.