



## Switching from Corn to Plantains Helps Honduran Farmers



Marta Galea's Farm

Photo by Samantha Croasdaile

**Jesus De Otoro, Honduras**—Marta Galeas used traditional farming techniques to plant her corn but felt her harvests were too small and the yields were too low. She lives in a fertile valley where big nearby landowners have one of the largest yields of

rice in the region. She said she was sure she could improve her yields and livelihood, if she only knew how.

Galeas and her family in the valley of Jesus de Otoro, Honduras, have grown corn all their lives. She normally planted 1 acre of corn for her household. She sold any leftover corn at the market for a profit of \$160 per season.

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

USAID's Rural Economic Diversification Program (USAID-RED) offered Galeas the opportunity to switch from corn production to plantains. But plantains are not traditionally grown in Jesus de Otoro, and she was reluctant to make 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. RED brought in a special soil 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.

Another challenge was getting a loan approved to buy fertilizers and other supplies. But Galeas was approved for a \$600 loan by going to the project's financial institution and to the women's cooperative in the area.

Galeas's crop has grown in size and has begun to produce seedlings. She has invested about \$500 to date and expects to produce about 80,000 pounds of plantains. Her farm is a model where other people receive training.

Conservative estimates predict she will earn \$10,000 from this crop, and an additional \$5,000 if she chooses to sell her seedlings. Galeas's life has been transformed, she said. 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 and 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.