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NCBA CLUSA Farmer-to-Farmer El Salvador

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Final Milestone Report

Work Plan Status

This report marks the end of a successful one-year Farmer-to-Farmer project in El Salvador. As per the work plan, over the course of the project, eight volunteers assisted six host organizations reaching 475 family beneficiaries. Volunteers provided technical assistance in a wide range of expertise, including cooperative governance, coffee exporting, and post-harvest processing to address the challenges that cooperatives face in their ability to become competitive in local and international markets.

NCBA CLUSA led the initiative of creating host profiles for each of the six cooperatives to provide volunteers with background on the history of the host organization and their needs. Scopes of work were developed in coordination with NCBA CLUSA and with input from the cooperatives, outlining what each volunteer would be expected to contribute during their assignment, along with the anticipated results of the assignment and the required expertise.

The recruitment and selection process for the volunteers began with outreach to NCBA CLUSA’s extensive network of agribusiness and cooperative experts, along with outreach on public channels such as recruitment websites and listservs. Candidates were vetted closely by NCBA staff to ensure that they possessed the technical skills requested by the cooperatives and the ability to operate within a different cultural context and actively engage with the cooperative members.

NCBA CLUSA’s selected volunteer candidates traveled to El Salvador to work with the cooperatives and share their expertise, recommendations, and best practices with the members. NCBA CLUSA effectively facilitated 8 volunteer assignments. The trips were planned to develop skills and address the challenges the Salvadoran cooperatives face in effectively participating in external markets.

Volunteer Projects in El Salvador during Grant Period						
	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4	Quarter 5	Total
	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Apr	
	2014	2014	2014	2015	2015	
Projected	0	4	2	2	0	8
Completed	0	4	1	3	0	8

Indicator Matrix

<i>Indicator</i>	Total
<i>Number of Volunteers</i>	8
<i>Number of Host Institutions Strengthened</i>	6
<i>Number of Persons Trained</i>	100*
<i>Number of Farm Families Benefitted</i>	300

***Most individuals participated in multiple trainings**

Activities by Country

El Salvador

NCBA CLUSA coordinated the travel of the 8 volunteers to each complete 14-15 day assignments in El Salvador with the assistance of Leon Bonilla, Logistics Coordinator for the project. Due to the proximity of the cooperatives to San Salvador and the similar interests amongst them, volunteers were able to extend their services to multiple cooperatives (2-4) during each visit.

After the first three volunteer assignments, which took place within the same timeframe, NCBA CLUSA was required to reevaluate the interest of one of the participating cooperatives, *El Rico*. Initially *El Rico* had readily committed to participating in the project, but it became clear after these assignments that they were no longer receptive to the assistance. Based on this assessment, NCBA identified a replacement organization, ACOCALUCO, which had expressed interest in participating upon hearing the positive feedback from the other three cooperatives.

Prior to the fourth volunteer assignment, an additional cooperative, *Las Lajas*, was also incorporated into the project. *Las Lajas* also reached out to NCBA CLUSA to request assistance and it was determined that their challenges and requirements were in alignment with the objectives of the project.

While on the ground, the volunteers received direct oversight from the project Logistics Coordinator, the volunteer translator and the host cooperative and in-depth briefings on the history of the cooperative and the challenges and opportunities that each had encountered. This allowed the volunteers to adequately tailor the technical assistance and recommendations that were given to the cooperative. They were also accompanied by a translator to facilitate communication with the cooperative members.

Volunteers spent time with the leaders, strategic committees, and individual members of the cooperatives, providing assessments and assistance with the products and strategies being put forth by the organizations and the systems that they currently have in place. This method seeks to work closely with the cooperative leadership, who then share the recommendations, skills, and lessons they received with the other members.

Volunteers covered a wide gamut of topics with the six cooperatives during the life of the project. Volunteer Robert Albrecht traveled to meet with the cooperatives and provide trainings on soil nutrition and fertility techniques for the improvement of productivity. This included supporting the cooperatives with recommendations for diversification to increase the cash flow needed for soil nutrition improvements, as well as testing for pH levels and working on composting.

Volunteer Mary Albrecht assisted the cooperatives with best practices for the marketing and processing of dehydrated fruits, sharing information on the quality standards that the products need to meet and providing them with input that they could integrate into a future business plan.

Volunteer Melvin Farmer worked with the cooperatives on methods for improving the genetic selection and culture practices of cashew, including grafting and strategies for enhancing the care of the soil and the trees.

Volunteer Pradeep Patnaik shared his expertise on best organic agricultural practices providing insight on the standards the cooperatives would need to meet related to the handling, processing, and packaging of their products.

Volunteer Eric Bowman trained members on cooperative governance and the business management for the cooperative to increase the comprehension of key governance function and create action plans.

Volunteer Allen Tackett focused on the management and marketing of national and international organic coffee with the host organizations, including investigating buyers and establishing business relationships with global clients, analyzing competitors in the organic coffee industry, and various other key aspects.

Volunteer Ralph Govin conducted training on harvest and post-harvest handling techniques and processes for vegetables to ensure that products meet basic standards of sizing, color, shape, maturity, packaging, labeling, etc. to allow for an increase in revenue.

Volunteer Tom Decker brought his expertise to the cooperatives in strengthening their ability to create solid business plans tailored to their needs with specific goals and objectives.

Written translations of the volunteer recommendations were provided to the host organizations and followed up on with the Logistics Coordinator. Below is a chart depicting the volunteer assignments that took place over the course of the project.

	Name	Volunteer	Country FTF Project	Assignment Start Date	Assignment End Date	Volunteer Days Completed	Host(s)
1	Cashew Tree Improvement	Melvin Farmer	El Salvador	8/22/2014	9/4/2014	14	El Rico and APRAINORES
2	Plant and Soil Nutrition	Robert Albrecht	El Salvador	9/10/2014	9/23/2014	14	El Jabali and ACOPO
3	Marketing/Processing of Dehydrated Fruits and Cashew	Mary Albrecht	El Salvador	9/10/2014	9/23/2014	14	El Rico and APRAINORES
4	Design/implementation of agricultural best practices for export of organic vegetables	Pradeep Patnaik	El Salvador	9/28/2014	10/10/2014	14	ACOPO, ACOCALUCO El Jabalí and APRAINORES
5	Cooperative Governance	Eric Bowman	El Salvador	11/24/2015	12/5/2014	15	ACOPO, ACOCALUCO, APRAINORES, and El Jabali
6	Coffee Exporting	Allen Tackett	El Salvador	1/15/2015	1/25/2015	11	El Jabali and Las Lajas
7	Post-Harvest Handling	Ramana Govin	El Salvador	2/8/2015	2/22/2015	15	ACOPO and ACOCALUCO
8	Business Plan Development	Thomas Decker	El Salvador	3/8/2015	3/22/2015	15	APRAINORES, LAS LAJAS, ACOPO
		TOTAL				112	

Public Outreach

When possible, news regarding the upcoming volunteer trips was disseminated through NCBA CLUSA's electronic Cooperative Business Journal. The project was also promoted at NCBA CLUSA's booth at the 2014 International Summit of the Cooperatives in Quebec. Volunteers were encouraged to reach out to their communities and professional networks regarding their experiences and lessons learned. For example, volunteer Eric Bowman met with local college students in his area and Equal Exchange to present the results of his trip. In country, Leon Bonilla, the local Logistics Coordinator, shared news of the project in meetings with CLUSA El Salvador partners and beneficiaries, which resulted in attracting new host organizations like Las Lajas and ACOCALUCO.

Case Study

a. Challenge

Cooperatives in El Salvador are looking to expand their business to the global marketplace. However, cooperative networks frequently lack the skills needed to effectively trade in highly complex end markets such as the United States. Understanding the needs of the end market and possessing the skills to function within it is essential for cooperatives to upgrade their production, business, processing, and packaging systems. The challenges they face are related to difficulties in terms of their organization and structure and the ability to invest in the necessary equipment, as well as improving the quality of their product. Cooperatives often lack the critical initial technical expertise to analyze their opportunities and make informed changes.

b. Initiative

Volunteers met with the cooperatives to provide them with knowledge and skills that would aid them in successfully operating a business cooperative and furthermore strengthen their competitive advantage within the market. Additionally, they assessed the products that the cooperatives are producing to aid them in ensuring that these meet foreign standards. Volunteers engaged with the cooperative members, ensuring that they were listening to the needs of the cooperatives and learning from the experiences of the cooperative as well. Based on their observations during their time with the cooperatives and the outcomes of their trainings, volunteers formulated short and long term recommendations for the cooperatives to assist them in meeting their goals and objectives surrounding gaining expanded access to external markets.

c. Results

The visits of the volunteers provided the cooperatives with fresh perspectives on the inner workings of their businesses and moreover the gaps and weaknesses that they need to address and solutions for these. From the volunteers they were able to gain knowledge regarding resources that they had not previously considered, and the skills to begin to make fundamental changes that will allow them to operate more efficiently and effectively participate in highly profitable value chains. The cooperatives have begun making important changes in everyday processes, as well as long term plans. For example: APRAINORES has begun to work with using energy saving equipment in the processing of its cashews and fruits; ACOPO has succeeded in reengaging with Walmart and gaining their support in vegetable distribution; Las Lajas is currently seeking financing for the renovation plan for their coffee farm that was created with the volunteers. Across the board the cooperatives have also begun to dedicate critical time to integrating the cooperative governance lessons.

It is important to note that the cooperatives did recommend exploring the possibility in the future of having these types of experiences be longer term assignments. Although they did value and

benefit from the expertise the volunteers provided, they acknowledged that there is additional value in having volunteers who could stay for an extended period and become intimately acquainted with the cooperative

d. Photos



