

2019 Program Report

2019 was a year of completion and maturity for most Food 4 Farmers programs. Originally, our work began as an add-on to our coffee co-op partners' main focus: selling coffee. In the last year, however, all have become a key component of our partners' strategic plans, now considered a viable way to achieve decent family livelihoods through farm diversification.

We've identified three elements that made our programs develop into a key priority for our partners:

1. *Flexibility.* Our home garden programs started out as a tool to improve family nutrition by creating a source of fresh, organic produce for daily consumption. As these programs developed, farming families saw a huge gap in the availability of local organic produce, and decided to take advantage of their garden production to generate income. We worked with them to build new community-appropriate strategies to support their initiative by designing new tools to develop local farmers markets and other community points of sale, as well as adding new farm products, such as organic lettuce and eggs, to respond to local demand. Now, we see coffee farming families and co-ops not only improving their own nutrition, but the entire community's access to healthy local food.
2. *Youth and women promoters.* There is no question that recruiting women and young people to support and sustain food security programs has been a great initiative. Originally, we hired and trained a program coordinator to manage the work at each co-op we partner with, and to serve as a liaison between the community and our organization. We soon realized that we needed to embed knowledge and skills more deeply and broadly within the community, to strengthen connections with participants, and to sustain both the community's learning and our own. We developed a new community promoter component, adding a network of young people to support both the Program Coordinator, and member-families. These promoters have been powerful and successful. Their knowledge, problem solving, and communication with hundreds of families creates a more direct connection. Our training program has given dozens of youth and women valuable skill-building opportunities, and many have moved on from the program to gain local employment.
3. *Training, training, training.* Though our work components are consistent, the challenges, capacity and context of each partner can vary a great deal. When designing our programs, we always assess specific training needs for each partner, and design the tools that fit them. Whether it's ensuring that food security program coordinators can support or enhance program management skills, educating community promoters about food security and organic farm production to better support families in the community, or helping women farmers improve their families' health and well-being through knowledge about good nutrition and environmentally sound farming practices, it's always about education and effecting behavioral change. Once skills are learned, we provide capacity training, ensuring that progress can be sustained.

In 2020, we have ambitious plans to improve the impact of this work, and strengthen the ability of coffee-growing communities to sustain it on their own. The first is to build a database -- a sharable, searchable and bilingual tool, that aggregates all data we've collected from our community partners over the past 9 years - that will greatly enhance our program data collection and analysis capacity, and better assess and communicate progress and results. We expect the first phase to be completed by September 2020.

Second, we are reviewing and enhancing our food security curricula. Because our curricular tools are adjusted and validated with communities on an ongoing basis, each community partner uses a customized version. We will work with our current partners to determine how they have been using the curricula, and we'll build on the most relevant, impactful content.

Finally, we are following up on our very successful and inspiring 2019 Food Security Coordinators Exchange -- which brought together Food Security Coordinators from our partners in Colombia, Guatemala, and Nicaragua – with a second one in the fall, considering sites in Chiapas, Mexico or Cauca, Colombia.

Here's a summary of our work and progress in 2019:

COMEPCAFE - Cauca, Colombia

1,400 families

Strategies: Diversity of food/seeds, communal learning and success, ramp up support for isolated communities, access to water/healthy soil, traditional/agroecological farming, opportunities for women and young people, restore food and farming traditions for indigenous community.

Community 1: Morales 200 member-families

We began working with this community -- part of the COMEPCAFE coffee cooperative, where 95% of member-families are indigenous - in 2016. COMEPCAFE continues to see strong representation and active engagement among participating families. Because the Morales community has made such strong progress over the past 4 years, we are in the process of transitioning our focus from implementation to a coach and consultant. We will continue to monitor progress to understand how the program develops, and to provide support when and where needed. We're excited about this new phase of work, as the community builds on independent, self-sustaining food security and improved livelihoods.

Organic market

Last year, participating families started to bring their produce to the Sunday market in the nearby community of Chimborazo. To formalize this new venture, we provided an outdoor booth and signage, while the group created a schedule so more people could participate. The market is now generating modest income, and there is strong potential for further growth and impact. We're now helping the group improve business practices, like tracking sales and beefing up marketing, to sustain this new venture that will strengthen access to fresh, healthy organic food, while expanding local economic opportunities.

Strengthening promoter skills

In 2019, we led workshops for promoters on accounting and marketing, as well as training on poultry production, focusing on good practices at a family scale. Promoters continued to provide families with technical support, listening to their experiences and concerns, and to monitor activities and progress.

Home gardens and laying hens

Along with seeds and inputs for 98 home gardens, we provided materials and inputs to improve poultry and egg production. Adding 30 more families this year.

Community 2: Caldono 150 families

Strengthening the team on the ground: We began working with this community in 2018. To embed expertise broadly and locally, we trained 11 community promoters to support families under the leadership of COMEPCAFE's Food Security Coordinator Dora Lopez. These young women and men completed 6 intensive trainings to develop expertise in the following areas: home gardens for personal and financial health; food preparation for family consumption; organic garden and crop management; and health, nutrition and water use. The group learned how to teach rural adult populations, and developed leadership skills. They then led "replicas" of these workshops with 142 participating families. COMEPCAFE plans to add more families to the program in 2020.

Growing home gardens: As of the end of 2019, there were 142 active home gardens, working toward the overall goal of 150 gardens. All families received necessary materials to establish their home gardens and plant seeds, with regular visits from promoters. We continue to actively recruit promoters to support the growing number of families.

SOPPEXCCA Organic Market - Jinotega, Nicaragua

520 families

Strategies: Better access to fresh food in the face of political upheaval, support women head of households

Training We continued to bolster the business skills of the 30 women managing the Mercadito Nutri-Hogar, focusing on entrepreneurship with a gender focus, sales techniques, financial management, and value-added products. Women learned to employ tools to improve sales, service, identify cost of production, and manage small business processes and records.

Home gardens Throughout the year SOPPEXCCA's Food Security Coordinator Lilliam Perez worked with women on their farms to support their home garden practices. She saw a marked improvement in quality and productivity of the gardens, which were actively managed. Production was coordinated by the group, which developed a system to deliver a continuous supply and variety of fresh produce for the market throughout the year. Women also continued to diversify food production on their farms.

Seed and seedlings were delivered to participants throughout the year, requiring organization and coordination to facilitate staggered production. Lettuce, cabbage, celery, beetroot, onion, carrot, cucumber, pipian, ayote and vainica were the main crops produced. Crop diversity and seed saving continued to be a focus of the work.

Results In 2019, we saw a significant growth in sales revenue throughout the year. In January, the total sales were only \$28.06 compared to December sales of \$1,300. 2019 sales totaled \$4,252, reflecting women's success in promoting the new venture to the larger community. There continue to be challenges: the first few months of the year tend to be slow, because women and their families are busy with the coffee harvest. However, in addition to the 10 crops we've provided, women have been adding other products from individual farms on their own, as well as value added products. We will continue to invest in marketing campaigns through radio and flyers to increase the visibility of the market.

SOPPEXCCA School Garden Program, Nicaragua

Food 4 Farmers, SOPPEXCCA, and Nicaraguan implementing partner ASDENIC are working with 4 elementary schools in the Jinotega/Matagalpa region. SOPPEXCCA wanted to bring food security and better health to students through school gardens, and serves as one of the implementing partners. Over the past 3 years, the program has grown from 200 to 560 students. Some are children of SOPPEXCCA members, but the majority are not. This is the power of partnering with cooperatives – they bring their expertise in reaching and serving the many families who are members, to the entire community, with the power of local leadership and collaboration.

Our current school garden programs are in the following communities:

- Los Alpes, 3 teachers, 90 students, 50 parents.
- Los Cerrones, 4 teachers, 96 students, 69 parents.
- Santa Rosa del Cua, 15 teachers, 355 students, 153 parents.
- Corinto Finca, 7 teachers, 19 students, 88 parents.

The schools grow a wide range of vegetables including cabbage, lettuce, chiltoma, beetroot, onion, corn and beans. Two schools are also growing medicinal plants, teaching students uses and benefits. Students do most of the garden maintenance, under the supervision of teachers who use the garden as a laboratory to teach subjects such as math and science. Harvested crops are prepared by parents and are part of the school lunch.

One of the program's main challenges has been water access for the Los Alpes school. Happily, after working on this for three years, in 2019 we facilitated a community process to help the school access drinking water. Some of that water is now used for irrigation. SOPPEXCCA and Food 4 Farmers provided the materials, while parents provided the labor.

CESMACH, Mexico

Apicultores Real del Triunfo Beekeeping Program

660 families, 86 Participants

Production: In 2019, honey production exceeded expectations, with a total of 31,983 kilos produced and sold, due to excellent flowering in the buffer zone of the Reserve of the Biosphere of El Triunfo, where the apiaries are located. Much credit goes to the continued visits from the co-op's Beekeeping Coordinator, Lucas Lopez, who visited 100% of the apiaries. He used the visits to create a log for each apiary, including information that will allow more efficient follow-up visits from him or his beekeeping promoters.

Marketing: 2019 sales totaled \$44,175 USD for the bulk honey sold to CESMACH's main buyer. Beekeepers received \$1.27 USD per kilo delivered to the cooperative, for a total payment to producers of \$40,777 USD. The price was disappointing, and producers expressed their frustration at the general assembly in November. Honey prices depend on international markets and this challenge is compounded by CESMACH's dependence on a single honey buyer. The group set a goal of finding additional buyers and developing honey that is differentiated and packaged for a more sophisticated, high-end clientele. As part of this effort, the group is working on organic certification, which will take most of 2020, and a significant amount of resources.

Strengthening Beekeeper skills: The program got important training from our partner Ecosur. Subjects included honey quality control, honey differentiation and queen bee rearing. We also facilitated a collaboration between the CESMACH beekeeping program and Root Capital, which provided 6 trainings focused on financial planning, establishment of internal control systems, and resource management. 31 participants attended these trainings geared toward developing skills to manage a new business, and transitioning to organic certification. We also signed a collaboration agreement with Root Capital that covers the cost of 2 promoters in a regional 2-year training program.

Equipment and materials: We provided funds to purchase 1 honey extractor and bee box building materials, along with beekeeping equipment and materials, to improve productivity. The new mobile extractor will be transported to different communities during honey harvests.

Maya Ixil, Guatemala

Beekeeping Program

192 families, 34 participants

Guatemalan farmers and beekeepers continue to face huge hurdles: low coffee prices, rising food costs, and climate change. Honey production was particularly low in 2019 -- 2,333 kilos of honey -- due to weather conditions that limited flowering of primary nectar sources, as well as low honey prices. The co-op bought the honey from beekeepers at \$1.66 USD per kilo, and sold it for \$1.93 per kilo.

Campaign to recruit new beekeepers. Because the number of beekeepers has remains relatively low, despite the efforts of co-op management to motivate other members to join the group, the cooperative has reduced the entry fee for new beekeepers to \$13 USD registration and \$13 USD annual dues. They also agreed to a 50% discount for materials and supplies sold to producers for the next harvest.

Technical assistance and training. The Coordinator focused on training beekeepers in hive division, feeding, varroa diagnosis, cell and queen selection. In recent months, training efforts were aimed at a group of 13 young people recruited to join the program, with topics on basic beekeeping, good practices of honey production, and skills to build hives and frames. We purchased 33 hives for these young people.

Asociacion Nuevo Futuro - Cauca, Colombia
Home Gardens, Farmers Markets, Water Management, Chicken and Egg Production
200 families

We are in the process of transitioning out of our collaboration with Nuevo Futuro. After 5 years, the association has formally incorporated the Food Security Program into their long-term Strategic Plan. We will continue our support through at least the first half of 2020, to give them time to find new partners and plan accordingly.

Promoters: In 2019, the Food Security Coordinator selected three young women to work as Promoters. All other promoters were either promoted to jobs within the association or got better paying jobs with other organizations. The coordinator implemented a training plan with these young women to support families' efforts in building food security and sovereignty, as well as organic food production. Promoters are now monitoring home gardens, and conducted a diagnostic for 50 new families who are being added to the program in 2020, for a total of 99 families out of 200 members. Promoters also learned about pest and disease control, establishment of allelopathic plants, and fertilizing with products derived from bio factories.

Technical assistance During the year, the Coordinator and Promoters provided technical support to families, evaluating the completion of activities such as selection and cleaning of land for establishing home gardens. They also monitored participants from the first phase, reporting that 95% of home gardens were still active and well managed. We're now working to establish irrigation systems for home gardens in 2020, in coordination with Engineers Without Borders.

New gardens: During the first half of the year, our evaluation results of the program's first phase were presented to Nuevo Futuro. We found that 95% of the home gardens remain active: 40% of the families did not have a home garden before the program, and the remaining 60% improved, expanded or reactivated their home garden. 33% of families found that the program helped reduce food spending by more than 50% compared to what they initially spent. The greatest challenge is dealing with pests and disease, so investing in training to reinforce these issues is a priority.

As the association adds 50 new families to the food security program, we'll work with Nuevo Futuro to collect baseline information. New families have been provided with materials and supplies to establish home gardens.

Revolving Loan Fund: Progreso Foundation, which funded our work with Nuevo Futuro from 2015 – 2018, approved \$2,200 to be used as a revolving loan fund. Although Nuevo Futuro has some experience in disbursing loans to members, this is the first time they will manage a fund exclusively for the food security program. For this reason, we have been working with the coordinator to define eligibility criteria, and determine credit products. We are also supporting the creation of a manual for the revolving fund that defines credit policies, which will need to be approved by the organization's membership.

Harvest Festivals: The Festival is an event that brings together 50 organizations from Cauca, and has been identified by Nuevo Futuro as a potential source of additional income for families and the organization as a whole. Nuevo Futuro has participated successfully in these events and this year, they decided to include families that are not participating in the program so that they can sell their own farm surplus.