

FOOD 4 FARMERS

Good Food Every Day for Coffee-Farming Families

Update from the Cooperatives

April 13, 2020



ACODIHUE 5,500 member-families

Huehuetenango, Guatemala

The pandemic is seriously impacting our food security program here. Collection of honey was supposed to begin in March, but the Guatemalan government ordered a cessation of activities and restricted all unnecessary movement. Communities panicked and set up roadblocks. These restrictions were revised on April 12, and after speaking with community authorities, Acodihue was given permission to collect coffee – but not honey, which needs to be harvested in April. They've asked the authorities to allow them to do so. Until then, everything's on hold.

Because of the travel restrictions, Acodihue beekeeping coordinator Luis Jimenez has not been able to visit apiaries at this key moment in the harvest cycle. Felix Camposeco, the co-op's coffee buyer, will work with Luis to try to ease restrictions and ensure that the honey can be harvested in time. Many participants are frightened, with some abandoning their apiaries completely. Luis is encouraging beekeepers to stay put and wait a few weeks to harvest the honey. They can't delay the harvest too long, because the rainy season begins in May, and weather conditions will lower honey quality.

The scenario is bleak, but Acodihue general manager Mariano Suasnavar is hopeful that they will be able to collect all the coffee and ship it as soon as possible.

SOPPEXCCA 520 member-families

Jinotega, Nicaragua

The cooperative is taking precautions and is restricting entrance to its offices.

Nutri-Hogar Women's Organic Farmers Market

When the 30 women participating in this program first heard about the coronavirus, they were too afraid to come to the market. The following week, though, they decided to continue selling their produce, because the income they now earn has become so important – monthly sales now exceed \$1,300, and they sell out every market day. Now, only a few women at a time come to the market facility in Jinotega, but they're bringing produce to sell for other women in the program, along with their own. They're using masks and gloves, and practicing social distancing with clients. They understand that there are risks, but they need the income, and don't want to take what they consider the biggest risk: closing the market.

Customers are still coming to the market to buy, and business has picked up. They are selling out more quickly these days, as fresh food becomes scarce in their rural communities. They're planning to add a new system of customer pre-orders, with the women delivering produce by bus. This month, they've added tamales to their offerings. Training activities are delayed, but all the gardens are active and thriving, with families consuming and producing as much as before the pandemic.

We've raised enough funds for SOPPEXCCA to purchase and distribute seeds and fertilizer – again, sending them by bus – and the community promoters are delivering them to all participants.

School Gardens

SOPPEXCCA's hope is that schools will remain open, because families depend on school meals to feed their kids and our school gardens have been a key resource in improving the quality of lunches and snacks to the 500 students in our program.

Both the school garden and Organic Market programs will need additional funds for seeds and seedlings. As food prices rise -- especially staples such as rice, maize and beans – and these staples are becoming scarce, Food 4 Farmers' school and home gardens for the Nutri-

Hogar Market are now critical lifelines for children, farming families, and the 130,000 residents of Jinotega.

COMEPCAFE 1,400 member-families

Cauca, Colombia

From Dora Lopez, COMEPCAFE's Food Security Coordinator: "The situation is very worrisome, we never imagined this! Everything is paralyzed and the government has imposed a process where people can only leave home on certain days by their id number."

Dora tells us community leaders have set up roadblocks, with only food trucks and ambulances allowed through. There is no public transportation. The coffee harvest is just starting, but high-quality specialty coffee won't be harvested until May. However, COMEPCAFE produces lower quality commercial coffee for local and national markets, so they're very concerned about their ability to collect and transport the coffee to their storage facility. The co-op is negotiating with local authorities to try and ease these restrictions.

Caldono Community

Before COVID-19 restrictions were in place, COMEPCAFE was preparing for its annual Food Security and Food Sovereignty Producer Exchange in Caldono. The event features native and seasonal seeds, and produce from member farms. All 1,400 members are invited, and it's an essential tool to build community awareness and enthusiasm for our food security program. In Caldono, the 100 participating families there prepared for the event by growing extra food to sell and exchange. After restrictions for COVID-19 were put in place, they were suddenly cut off from local food markets. People with cash in their community bought up all the dry goods, leaving cash-poor families without access to their regular staples. At the same time, food prices shot up.

This month, the families in Caldono sent Food 4 Farmers a message of gratitude, telling Coordinator Dora Lopez that they have been bartering, selling and consuming all the foods from their gardens. They're grateful for the encouragement to grow their own food, and for all the training, support and materials they've received. "It's a life saver!" said community promoter Rosa Marin. Seeds have recently been distributed -- enough for the upcoming growing cycle -- and COMEPCAFE is confident that food grown in these home gardens will be enough to get their member-families through the next few months.

Morales Community

After 5 years, we're planning to exit our implementation phase in the community of Morales. The community promoters and 100 participating families have completed all trainings, established thriving home gardens, and are eating healthy, fresh food every day. COMEPCAFE now has the capacity to manage the work independently, and they're adding 50 new families to the program in 2020. The major impact here has been their ability to bring back native varieties of maize and beans, allowing families to save seeds and replant, to ensure a long-term supply of their main staple foods. Unfortunately, other seeds are

harder to save, and they will need more seeds for future plantings. COMEPCAFE is currently making the case with local authorities that distribution of seeds is an essential service, and does not pose a danger to the community.

Although the pandemic is a tragedy in many ways, it has also helped these coffee-farming families realize how important it is to take control of their food sources – and it's giving them a way to help their communities through times of crisis.

Nuevo Futuro 200 member-families Cauca, Colombia

The coffee harvest has begun in Nuevo Futuro communities, and there are many challenges in collecting, processing, and shipping the coffee. Nuevo Futuro staff is coordinating with local authorities to get permission to transport coffee and allow coffee pickers to enter and work on farms. Some farmers use coffee pickers, but the majority depend on a local system they call “lend hands,” exchanging labor between neighboring farming families to save money. It's an important resource for these small farmers, and now threatened because of widespread fear of contracting COVID-19. Nuevo Futuro is setting up guidelines to comply with social distancing, so families can work together safely.

For now, the food supply is good here, but prices have risen sharply. The 50 families in our home garden program – and soon, 50 new ones joining this year - are using their now-critical resource to feed themselves and share produce with their friends and neighbors. In the meantime, food prices have increased and people with available cash are buying everything up and hoarding supplies, leaving other families to suffer food scarcity.

