



Update from the Field

June 2020

In the two months since our previous update, the impacts of COVID-19 have become more evident in the countries where we work. Across Latin America, concerns are growing about the pandemic's effects on rural communities, where reliable and effective health services are largely unavailable. We will continue to monitor the situation and will update this post with new information as we receive it.

Country	Total Confirmed Cases	Total Confirmed Deaths	Population
Mexico	196,847	24,324	126,200,000
Guatemala	14,819	601	17,250,000
Nicaragua	2,014	74	6,466,000
Colombia	77,313	2,491	49,650,000

Data source: WHO June 26, 2020 Coronavirus Situation Report & the World Bank.

Source: [World Health Organization](#)

Though the pandemic is primarily a public health emergency, its effects are ripping through all aspects of life – especially food security. A [recent report from the World Food Programme](#) (WFP) projects that the number of people suffering from acute hunger around the world could double in 2020.

The WFP's report [highlighted Guatemala](#) as one of the most affected countries in Central America. COVID-19 may further exacerbate social inequality, climate change, and poverty that have placed nearly 18% of the population in a food crisis.

The pandemic has also exposed flaws in a global food system that is over reliant on centralized, large-scale production, struggling with the consolidation of supply chains – and highlights the relevance of our work with coffee-farming families. Our focus on strategies that promote local food production is having a real and immediate impact by helping families weather COVID-19, while improving their resilience and health.

We're continuing to deliver crucial food security support and services to our cooperative partners and their 8,0000 member-families in Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Colombia.

Partner Updates

SOPPEXCCA



Janeth Méndez Nueva recently joined our home garden and women's farmers market programs at SOPPEXCCA.

The situation has changed significantly for the 33 women in our farmers market program at SOPPEXCCA. Twelve deaths from COVID-19 were traced to the municipal market near SOPPEXCCA's offices and the women's market. Co-op management immediately closed their offices and the market for at least two weeks.

Women in the program are actively managing their home gardens, providing fresh food for their families, and selling produce in their individual communities. Some are sharing their expertise with the 4 schools in our school garden program, jointly managed with SOPPEXCCA. Co-op food security promoters continue to offer support and training, and they're seeing results as women invest more time in their gardens. They all now see the importance of producing their own food. Fatima Ismael, the general manager of SOPPEXCCA, told us:

"It has been a very tense time. We have seen an increase in cases in Jinotega. We know of at least two co-op members or family of members who have been infected. There is a lot of fear as

many people who migrate for work in Costa Rica have come back to their communities and are suspected of being infected.

“On top of that, there is limited guidance from the government, and people are seeking information from a variety of sources, some of them completely bogus or sensationalist. The lack of leadership is causing confusion and fear. Crime is also spiking as jobs and remittances decrease, creating an atmosphere of uncertainty and insecurity.

“Our priority right now is to secure basic food and inputs for farmers so they can adequately prepare for the next coffee season and care for their families.”

[*Read more about our work with SOPPEXCCA.*](#)

ACODIHUE

Guatemala has taken strong measures to contain and mitigate the effects of the pandemic, but most rural communities are struggling. Families at ACODIHUE in northwestern Guatemala have seen a large increase in food staple prices and have reduced their daily rations. The high unemployment rate continues to rise, with few options for income. There is also widespread fear of returning deportees from the US and Canada, some of whom have been diagnosed with COVID-19.



ACODIHUE beekeepers are encountering challenges in cultivating coffee and maintaining their hives.

Coffee farmers here have been unable to buy the inputs they need for to adequately maintain their coffee plots, which will affect the next harvest and result in even lower income. ACODIHUE beekeepers report that the rise in food prices has made it difficult to buy sugar to feed their bees during the rainy season.

In response, ACODIHUE is checking in with members more frequently, through phone calls and a WhatsApp group, to support and encourage them to continue their work with coffee and beekeeping. The co-op partnered with two coffee buyers to pack and distribute 1,300 food packages with basic staples and honey from co-op members. We're working with ACODIHUE to ensure our food security program remains active throughout 2020, and we'll be shifting resources to help families meet their food needs through training and materials for new home gardens.

[*Read more about our work with ACODIHUE.*](#)

Maya Ixil

Young promoters at Maya Ixil are using their new skills developed at our workshops to pivot from building hives and making protective beekeeping clothing, to now making masks and other PPE. These are being distributed among co-op members and shared with people in this small community. Maya Ixil recently finished the honey harvest, and the co-op has started a nursery for pollinator-friendly plants to distribute to beekeepers.

We recently moved all management training online, in lieu of in-person visits. Even with spotty internet, this approach is proving effective for program management and training, especially on topics like impact monitoring and financial management.

[*Read more about our work with Maya Ixil.*](#)

COMEPCAFE

While parts of Colombia have started to open up, rural communities continue to experience lockdowns to curb the spread of the virus. This has made home gardens even more valuable for COMEPCAFE families. They're producing large volumes of vegetables, helping them weather the crisis. They've also started saving and buying their own seeds, as families see the value of their gardens and are actively investing in them.



Home gardens have been so successful that COMEPCAFE families are donating vegetables to people in need in the city of Popayan, where COVID-19 has caused rampant unemployment.

[Read more about our work with COMEPCAFE.](#)

Nuevo Futuro

Nuevo Futuro tells us their member-families are healthy, and doing their best to cope with regulations and lockdowns. Their home gardens are an important lifeline, delivering harvests of onions, swiss chard, green beans, cucumbers, and spinach. Now, families are eagerly awaiting the corn harvest. Though their food supply is stable at the moment, many remain worried about rising prices.



Clara Edilma Montenegro and her daughter, a Nuevo Futuro food security community promoter, share their garden harvest.

We're working with Nuevo Futuro to eventually shift the organization's approach to home gardens by organizing new community gardens, managed by local member-boards, once the pandemic subsides. They plan to establish four or five gardens to support 80 more families, joining the 49 families who already have gardens.

[Read more about our work with Nuevo Futuro.](#)

CESMACH

CESMACH had seen little impact from the pandemic until the recent death of three people in Jaltenango. Now, the local bank has closed, people are limiting travel to avoid contamination, and are finally using masks. Our beekeeping group here has faced delays in their honey harvest, and has had to spend additional funds to transport their honey to the co-op to be stored. We're continuing our work with the CESMACH team – albeit remotely – to explore new markets for their honey and improve their processes.

[Read more about our work with CESMACH.](#)