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## **Vegetable Exports -- Ticket Out of Poverty**

*Communities come together, form associations, produce, export products and savor a new life*

José Luis Canú is a vegetable producer in the community of Chirijuyú in Tecpán, Chimaltenango. His family, like every other family around, lived in hamlets and eked out a subsistence living from the fertile volcanic plots around them. Most lived in extreme poverty with dirt floors, no running water, never enough to eat, no school nearby for children and youth to attend.

That began to change in 1993 when the community established an association of agricultural producers called “Labradores Mayas”. The association was 40 people working in the fields and five in the new packaging plant. The vegetables they raised were sold to middlemen who determined the income from produce.

Then, in 2003, an AGEXPORT (Trade Association for Non-traditional Exports) supply chain alliance specialist visited Labradores. He perceived these farmers as a well-organized group with strong leaders and the determination to accomplish their goal to improve community well-being.

The specialist engaged support from the USAID/AGEXPORT Supply Chain Alliance Program and with this, Labradores strengthened production and became certified for Good Agricultural and Manufacturing Practices. They also systematized administrative functions to comply with international buyer requirements so they can compete in international markets. It paid off: In 2006, Wal-Mart signed up Labradores to supply vegetables and fruits to the tune of approximately \$14,500 per week of export quality lettuce, carrots, celery and broccoli.

A mere decade later, Labradores Mayas has become one of Wal-Mart Central America’s main suppliers. More than 87 families work for Labradores Mayas-- 165 people work in the fields and 28, mostly women, work in the packaging plant.

José Luis Canú reflected: *“A couple of months ago, a group of producers from other areas came to ask us to protest with them against CAFTA, the new Free Trade Agreement. Our answer was that we did not fear CAFTA, on the contrary, we were eager for it to be signed because we were ready! We are now receiving orders from different parts of the world. Yesterday I received an e-mail from Canada, asking for a weekly container of fresh broccoli!”*

*“More women can earn money now and we learned about hygiene standards for the packaging plant that we now use at home and we don’t get sick as often”* says Mr.Canú’s wife.

The impressive story of Laboradores Mayas, and particularly Mariano Canú, are now known beyond the Chirijuyú municipality thanks to President and Mrs. Bush’s specific stop to meet the Canú family at the Labradores packing plant during the presidential visit to Guatemala in March 2007. See [http://www.usaid.gov/gt/visit\\_president\\_bush.htm](http://www.usaid.gov/gt/visit_president_bush.htm) for more information and detail on President Bush’s visit to Guatemala and Labradores Mayas.