



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

**GUATEMALA**

# BEFORE & AFTER

## Saving Lives and Protecting Forests

### Guatemalan farmers learn safer and more productive techniques

*Guatemala's agricultural history dates back to the times of the ancient Mayas. For centuries, land has been cleared using slash and burn techniques to prepare it for planting new crops. This method leads to environmental degradation, forest fires, and even fatal accidents. Fires are also hard to control, and hundreds of acres of precious land are often destroyed by mistake. USAID has been working with Mayan farmers to teach them safer and more productive harvesting and land preparation techniques. The project taught residents how to: monitor population of wildlife; apply sustainable forest harvesting methods; conduct field research; and organize local fire-fighting and surveillance brigades. Villagers now know how to effectively prevent forest fires and use resources in a sustainable way. The efforts have reduced the number of fires in these areas; in 2005 there were no fires in some communities. While slash and burn clearing still occurs, farmers are learning about better agricultural techniques and the harmful effects fires can have on both the environment and health.*

#### Telling Our Story

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Photo: H.W. Photography/Holly Wilmett

**BEFORE** Farmers put their health and even their lives at risk when using slash and burn techniques. With little protection and little knowledge of safety procedures, Mayan farmers or hired workers often had serious or fatal accidents while burning fields in preparation for new crops to be planted.



Photo: USAID/S. Dominguez

**AFTER** After learning about safer clearing techniques from a USAID-sponsored awareness campaign, students painted this sign, which says: "Don't Burn the Forests — Or do you want to end life?" Through its programs, USAID has helped farmers realize that by choosing other clearing methods not only are they saving the forests — they are saving lives.