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EL SALVADOR

SUCCESS STORY

Cheesemakers Set Sights on Exports

A volunteer dairy expert shows cheesemakers new techniques



Photo: Winrock/Ricardo Auerbach

Josefa Moran, right, makes mozzarella cheese with the help of volunteer Mike Costello in Sonsonate, El Salvador.

“Our experiments went so well that we may have created a gourmet market for traditional Salvadoran cheeses,” said Josefa Moran, a cheesemaker from the Salvadoran city of Sonsonate.

Dairy processors in El Salvador have their own kind of American dream: they want to be able to export their tasty products to the United States and beyond. But fulfilling that dream usually takes more than just a lot of hard work — it also takes know-how and familiarity with modern cheesemaking processes that comply with the often-complex rules and regulations of export markets.

Confident that Salvadorean cheesemakers had the ability and desire to compete internationally, a dairy expert from Washington State University, Michael Costello, went to El Salvador to show them what they needed to do to make their cheese eligible for export. Costello, a volunteer with the USAID-sponsored Farmer-to-Farmer program, worked with an association of 35 dairy plants teaching cheesemakers safe and modern cheesemaking processes and how to use commercial cultures to replace unpasteurized milk. Twenty cheesemakers learned to produce a new cheese: mozzarella. They also successfully reproduced traditional cheeses using modern techniques, which will be marketed as specialty foods. Having learned how to make new high-value products and reinvent traditional products for sale to high-value markets, cheesemakers are well-positioned for making their way into larger, more profitable markets.

Take Josefa Moran, for example. Moran went to the United States to learn more about cheesemaking technology. She attended a course at Washington State University, which Costello had told her about. Now she consults with dairy association members, sharing her knowledge of quality standards and formulas for different cheese varieties. Her own family’s company is expanding and has opened an upscale store in downtown Sonsonate, a large city in western El Salvador, which sells gourmet cheese.

By improving production processes and product quality, Salvadoran cheesemakers have taken an enormous step toward meeting requirements for exports to the U.S. and other large-scale markets.

Telling Our Story
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