



SUCCESS STORY

New Practices Improve Dairy Farming

New grazing methods improve cows' health and production



Photo: Ronald Blandon, Partners/Nicaragua

Farmer to Farmer volunteers work together with Nicaraguan cattlemen to install an electric fence.

Francisco claims that the new intensive grazing system is the most important innovation he has seen in his 22 years as a farmer and cattleman. "The Farmer to Farmer Program changed my life," he said.

Dairy farmer Francisco Gutierrez Espinosa has 525 acres of land in Boaco, Nicaragua. Using a traditional grazing system, he needed to dedicate 315 of those acres to maintain 22 milk cows. Each cow gave an average of 5 liters of milk a day, but

many days, Francisco said the cows were so spread out that his workers could not get to them all. The cows expended a lot of energy walking great distances, and they were not healthy, requiring regular treatment for ticks and internal parasites.

Since 1996, USAID has funded the Farmer to Farmer Program to support Nicaragua's dairy industry by improving milk production, conservation, storage, processing and commercialization. Volunteer agriculturalists from Wisconsin traveled to Nicaragua to conduct conferences, seminars and field days that taught farmers how to improve the cows' nutrition using intensive rotational grazing and electric fencing.

They also helped design and install these systems for farmers who elected to try them. Francisco Gutierrez, who attended a seminar in June 2002, was one of these farmers.

With this new system, Francisco is able to maintain his milk cows on only 25 acres, subdivided in small pastures where the cows rotated daily. On the land that has been freed up, he has planted avocado trees and other produce.

As president of the 42-member Santiago Dairy Cooperative, Francisco has spread the word that the new intensive grazing system is simpler and less expensive than other available technologies. Several members have already obtained loans from the co-op's credit association to purchase their own electric fence equipment.

Francisco says the system has renewed his enthusiasm for the business, and he claims that it is the most important innovation he has seen in his 22 years as a farmer and cattleman. He says he has never had better pasture and that his cows have never been so healthy or had so few parasites. Milk production on Francisco's farm is up to 8 liters a cow a day. "Farmer to Farmer changed my life," he says.

Telling Our Story

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