



Crop Diversification Brings Hope to the Poorest Challenge

In the mountain valleys on the Bolivian Andes' eastern slope, most of Bolivia's horticultural crops are grown though agricultural conditions which are largely unfavorable. In the Chuquisaca state high valleys, farmers make up the poorest people of Bolivia, with an average annual income of only \$350. Families struggle to live on remote, arid land where roads are few and in poor condition, soil is poor, and the temperature fluctuations are extreme. People live in adobe houses and mostly cultivate low value potatoes and forage corn.



Photo: USAID/Bolivia

Farmers from Bolivia's high valleys show off their crops generated by USAID's oregano project.

Following promising trials and three years of intensive effort, six tons of dry oregano were sent to Brazil as the first large commercial export of oregano in late 2003.

Results

Although most participating farmers have 30 meters by 30 meters plots, they have been able to raise their incomes by an average of fifty percent. Improved productivity and marketing are expected to raise incomes by a further twenty-five percent. The number of participating growers is also expected to increase by twenty-five percent. New spices are being introduced including anise, cumin, lemon grass and basil, providing additional income opportunities.

U.S. Ambassador to Bolivia David Greenlee met with a farmer in the program and learned that unlike the annual planting of potatoes, the farmer only had to plant oregano once every six years. Now he and his wife can manage the plot alone, without their children enabling them to attend school. The farmer had earned no income from his land before - producing only enough potatoes for his family's minimal subsistence needs.

Initiative

In 2002, USAID helped the Chuquisaca valley farmers' association develop an oregano crop with over 400 families participating. Analysis of the region determined that while local soils are poor, environmental conditions resemble those in Greece, where oregano originated. Furthermore, oregano is a crop with great market potential and much higher profit-to-production-cost ratio than traditional crops grown in the region

Farmers contribute fifteen percent of the assistance they receive in cash. They are taught better production, post harvest and drying practices, and crop management on a monthly harvesting cycle, giving them a greater income. The extraction of essential oil of oregano has also begun. Furthermore, the farming is organic and without chemicals – which increases its appeal in lucrative foreign markets.

