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New Farm Techniques Improve Lives

Workshops benefit poor farmers in the Panama Canal Watershed



Photo: USAID/Elicecida Meléndez

Subsistence farmers Margarita Flores and Rodrigo Flores use new techniques learned at a USAID workshop.

“I am excited about how this program has already changed my life and the hope it has brought to my family for a brighter tomorrow,” said Margarita Flores, a subsistence farmer.

Telling Our Story
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By her own account, nineteen year-old Margarita Flores is no longer the shy young woman she was before participating in a USAID training program on sustainable agriculture for soil and water conservation. Margarita’s brother, Rodrigo, encouraged her to attend the training workshop on improving farming techniques. The training provided farmers with the tools and know-how to improve yield and diversify crops on small farms, while reducing soil erosion in the sensitive Panama Canal Watershed area. Now, in spite of her youth, she feels empowered as an agent of change.

As with hundreds of thousands of people who settled in the Panama Canal Watershed, scraping a living off the land or working as day laborers, Margarita felt she had little power to change things. She wanted to take control of her life. With skills gained from the workshop, Margarita is doing just that. She has shared her new knowledge with her parents, siblings, and extended family, transforming farming practices across her whole family.

With visible pride and a big smile on her weathered face, Margarita’s mother tells how the use of organic fertilizers, improved planting techniques, and other best practices have already resulted in several good harvests under Margarita’s direction. There is a marked difference in the family’s well-being, and the whole family is excited about an upcoming agricultural fair at the town square, where they can sell some of their produce, including medicinal plants.

Margarita and her family have learned that, with the right techniques, farms can produce more while reducing erosion and improving water quality in the Panama Canal Watershed.