



PRESS RELEASE

Bush Visits Mayan Entrepreneurs in Guatemala

CHIMALTENANGO, GUATEMALA—11 March 2007. *“What we have done here in Labradores Mayas, many other Guatemalans can do in other parts of our country. What we need is help getting the basic resources like irrigation systems and training in how to produce products to international standards. This is the technical assistance that the U.S. Government has given us and our own AGEXPORT, too”* said Canú, current president of Labradores Mayas Association in Chirijuyú, Tecpán in the state of Chimaltenango in the Guatemalan highlands.

President Bush visited the Labradores Mayas packing plant where he met Mr. Mariano Canú, a 55 year-old Kaqchiquel Mayan farmer. Labradores Mayas is a marketing association of 66 farming families that produce lettuce, beets, carrots, broccoli, and celery. As Mr. Canú often states, there are various associations of small farmers like Labradores and many more could be established in Guatemala. These small farmers can convert their small family plots of land into highly productive agribusiness ventures that improve their income to the extent that they can pull their families out of poverty—in Canú’s region, as in much of Guatemala, seven out of ten people live in poverty.

Taking advantage of new trade opportunities requires a lot from small farmers and, no matter how motivated and capable they are, they still require support that can best be provided for everyone’s benefit by government in partnership with the private sector: support such as finance for irrigation systems; technical assistance in areas like market intelligence, international product standards, phytosanitary regulations; and physical infrastructure such as dependable rural road systems. The U.S. Government, through its U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), has worked in partnership with the Government of Guatemala, the private sector, and rural communities to obtain these essential ingredients in growth and trade.

Upon President Bush’s arrival to Labradores Mayas, Mr. Wayne Nilsestuen, Director of USAID/Guatemala, explained to the President and visiting dignitaries how associations like Labradores Mayas increase competitiveness and take advantage of the opportunities that free trade agreements like CAFTA-DR offer. They do so when they:

- Form legal associations so they can increase the production capacity and export products;
- Establish and maintain Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) and Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs);
- Develop market intelligence to know and understand the competition and potential buyers and new markets;
- Comply with international standards and regulations for quality product;
- Know and follow protocols for export.

Guatemala has more examples of small producers that have met these challenges and are now exporting to foreign markets. The advantages of preparing small producers to be more competitive in international markets are multiple and carry over to their families, communities and society in general. The immediate and tangible advantages include more job opportunities and increased incomes, particularly for women and youth; improved health, nutrition, and hygiene; access to primary and secondary education; housing improvements such as converting dirt floors to concrete and piping water into the house;

The benefits of growing the number of small producers associations that meet the requirements for product export are far reaching when one considers that Guatemala has some of the starkest indicators in the hemisphere: 56% of the population lives in poverty—most are rural and indigenous; average schooling is four years; the 4.3 fertility rate is the highest in the region; 49% of population is under 18 years old; infant mortality is the third highest in Latin America at 39 per 1,000 live births; and, Guatemala has the third highest level of income inequality in the world.

#
