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EL SALVADOR

CASE STUDY

Safe Pesticide Use Saves Lives

Comprehensive farming strategy goes beyond improving crop yields



Juan Antonio Martinez uses protective clothing provided by USAID while mixing pesticides for an onion crop in San Juan Opico, La Libertad.

“It is the very first time that we have received guidance on the misuse and abuse of pesticides in relation to human health,” said Jose Daniel Herrera, a farmer from Delicias de Concepción, Morazan who underwent USAID-sponsored training.

Telling Our Story

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Challenge

In 2005, 189 people in El Salvador died from pesticide poisoning and a thousand more were subjected to various levels of exposure. The misuse and mishandling of chemicals occurs often, largely because many people are not aware of how hazardous they can be. Few farmers own protective equipment for spraying, and many store pesticides inside their homes. Most farmers mix chemicals at potable water sources and clean pesticide containers in streams. Empty containers might be used to store food and water, and children play with discarded containers. Quite frequently farmers choose the wrong pesticide or use too much of it.

Initiative

In 2003, USAID launched a farm chemical safety program to train farmers in integrated pest management, a comprehensive approach that includes pest and disease monitoring and the commercial use of biological products, traps, crop rotation, and live barriers. The program also helps farmers pick the right pesticides and use them correctly. The approach is designed to both improve crop productivity and reduce pesticide use. Farmers learn how to properly store and dispose of pesticides and containers and how to protect themselves, their families, and the environment from dangerous exposure. In addition, the program educates farmers about first aid, pesticide labels, and proper mixing and spraying techniques. USAID has invested over \$50,000 in training, educational materials, protective clothing, on-farm chemical mixing sites, storage lockers, and plastic barrels for disposing empty chemical containers.

Results

Farmers now store pesticides in locked storage bins outside of the home and out of children’s reach. They wear protective gear and use chemical mixing sites located far away from potable water sources. As of May 2006, the program had trained nearly 3,100 participants. As a result, farmers and their families are more aware of the potential hazards of pesticide misuse.

Photo: Fintrac Inc.