



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

**GUATEMALA**

## CASE STUDY

# A Healthy Forest Makes a Healthy Profit

### Community members profit from forest maintenance



Photo: Chemonics

Petén community members harvest and prepare mahogany for shipping.

***In the Árbol Verde concession, only half the land has commercial forestry potential, but the community's timber harvest uses a protective, 30-year cycle that ensures a healthy forest — and shows a profit.***

### Challenge

The Maya Biosphere Reserve in Guatemala's northern Petén is a vast area of forest that is not suited for agriculture, but is vital for tourism — one of Guatemala's top sources of revenue — and for marketing forest products. The reserve is essential to Guatemala's economic and environmental well-being. Most immigrants to Petén settle on the forest land to farm, and, every few years, move on in search of better soil when the land becomes unproductive. Largely from small rural communities where subsistence depended on farming of corn and beans, the immigrants brought techniques that destroy the Petén's tropical habitat, like slash and burn land clearing.

### Initiative

USAID supports programs that enable poor subsistence farmers with little or no formal education to generate income while maintaining the forest. The farmers are learning about forest management, product certification and marketing, and financial management. They are also taught how harvesting and marketing forest products from a healthy forest generates increased and sustainable income for families and communities. Women and men are now proudly managing their forest concessions as small, prosperous community businesses.

### Results

In the Árbol Verde concession, only half the land has commercial forestry potential, but the community's timber harvest uses a protective, 30-year cycle that ensures a healthy forest — and shows a profit. In 2003, Árbol Verde generated \$890,000 from timber sales, which allowed the community members to cover operational costs, invest in new machinery and sewing equipment, and train sons and daughters in carpentry. The concession generates 10,960 jobs annually and can now access an international market for unfinished products. Now that they have an economic incentive to conserve "their" forest, the residents of Árbol Verde have committed to maintaining vast areas of tropical forest that would otherwise have been destroyed.