



A “New Northern Zone” with Greater Opportunities for Salvadoran Dairy Farmers

Fifty years ago, Salvadorans envisioned a highway that would connect northern El Salvador with the rest of the country, helping create opportunities for the region’s residents. The Northern Zone was considered a forgotten area and had been largely cut off from the rest of the country in part because of the civil war, which lasted more than 12 years until the peace accords of 1992.

This dream has become reality. More than 220 kilometers of road and 23 bridges have been rehabilitated or constructed in northern El Salvador as part of the country’s five-year, \$461 million compact with the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC). The east-west highway connects to major border crossings with Guatemala and Honduras, and the improvements are expected to reduce travel time along this route from 12 hours to six hours.

MCC has also assisted an estimated 17,500 out of a total of 32,000 producers in selected value chains in the Northern Zone by providing training, seeds, equipment, and technical assistance. MCC’s investments have strengthened eight value chains through training, promoting new technologies and strengthening product commercialization and marketing through partnerships with the private sector. The value chains supported include dairy, horticulture, crafts, tourism, coffee, aquaculture, beekeeping and forestry.

“To me, this seemed an impossible dream,” said Raul Armando Vaquero, a dairy farmer who received training and lives in the small town of Cuyuiscat.

For the past 35 years, Vaquero needed a horse and carriage to transport the cheese and milk he sold to customers around Metapán. In the winter season, swollen rivers prevented Vaquero and his employees from even reaching markets.

The Northern Transnational Highway project has made markets accessible for Vaquero in the winter and significantly reduced delivery time in all four seasons. He can now drive to Nueva Concepción, a larger city with bigger markets, and deliver a fresher, higher quality product.



Raul Armando Vaquero, like many other dairy producers, doubled his income after one year of receiving training funded by MCC.

Based on the preliminary findings of an impact evaluation, dairy farmers who participated in the project increased their annual productive income by an estimated \$1,850 on average within one year of receiving assistance compared with those who did not receive assistance. These farmers sold a larger volume of milk and other dairy products than farmers who did not receive assistance.

The people of the Northern Zone now have the foundation in place for a more prosperous future: roads, bridges, water, electrification, sanitation, and a trained workforce.

“We now live in a new Northern Zone,” Vaquero said. “We are now living in a land of opportunity.”