



# SUCCESS STORY

## Harvesting Out of Poverty

When we first wrote about Edras Mateo in 2009, he was receiving training through the \$30.4 million Farmer Training and Development Activity in the Rural Development Project. The Rural Development Project is a major component of Honduras's compact with the U.S. Government's Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC). Edras lives in Belen Gualcho, a town of about 18,000 residents in the Ocotepeque province, in western Honduras. Edras is one of the 122 Program farmers in the town of Belen Gualcho (out of 471 Program farmers in the department of Ocotepeque) who are receiving an integrated package of training that involves crop management, business skills, marketing, and postharvest handling. Through MCA-Honduras, the local entity implementing Honduras's MCC Compact, MCC funds have been used to provide technical assistance and training to over 7,000 farmers all over Honduras, and more than 6,000 of them have improved their productivity and earned net incomes over \$2,000 a hectare per year. Through an integrated approach, more than 1,200 of the farmers trained received loans through the Access to Credit Activity to help finance their farm operations, and more than 4,000 farmers received drip irrigation equipment under a small grants component to improve their productivity.



Edras Mateo pictured with his wife and sons in their new home can now provide more opportunities for his children.

Three years after enrolling in the Farmer Training and Development Activity, Edras has expanded his production beyond lettuce to include broccoli, beets and carrots. With the increase in income, Edras has purchased a house for his family and 5.6 hectares of land to expand his farm production. In addition, he now is respected as a community leader and trains other farmers so that they can increase and diversify their yields like he has been able to do.

Edras's story began in 2006, when he was desperately looking to start a different life beyond poverty and gangs, and had left Guatemala to return home to Honduras. His family encouraged him to go into agriculture. He borrowed money to rent land and buy fertilizer and received lettuce seeds from a friend to start. He learned the basics of agriculture from his neighbors and reading some pamphlets. After his first harvest he paid off his debt and bought inputs for the next crop. However he was only making enough to get by.

In May 2007, Edras found out from his neighbors about the technical assistance provided to farmers through the MCC-funded project. He contacted the activity's field agronomist working in his area to explore ways to maximize his production and reduce the risk of pests and post-harvest loss. The agronomist identified weeds, pests and diseases in his crop and provided basic practices and technical recommendations to increase the output of Edras' harvests.

Since then, Edras has implemented the project's best agricultural practices, including seedling trays, plantlet selection, starter solutions and monitoring and control of weeds, pests and disease through an integrated pest management strategy. He uses a drip irrigation system and a customized fertilizer program to provide his crops with proper nutrition, along with plastic crates for harvesting. Edras' farm is now yielding larger volumes and higher quality produce which he sells to local supermarkets.



With newfound access to electricity, Edras proudly turns on the light at his house. He also bought a refrigerator and a gas stove, which he previously didn't have.

Edras and the majority of the farmers who have been trained are examples of MCC's commitment to sustainably increase the profitability of men and women involved in agriculture. For many farmers, this is their first participation in an agricultural program with such an integrated approach. Regular technical assistance and training has helped them improve their farming, marketing and business practices that used to limit their productivity and profitability. Moving forward, they will use these modern practices and support each other as they continue to harvest out of poverty, through market-demanded products and practices that give them higher yields and profits.