Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

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Guatemala's Private Sector Helps Ramp Up the Fight Against Coffee Rust

José de León, a small-scale coffee producer and member of the Cooperativa San Pablo in Guatemala's Western Highlands, has seen firsthand the consequences of the coffee rust outbreak that started at the end of 2012. Climate change has caused the temperature in his community to rise just enough to allow the rust to thrive and spread rapidly. Coffee rust is an easily spreadable fungus that infects the leaves of coffee plants and causes them to fall prematurely. Without leaves, the plants are unable to produce the energy needed to grow abundant, quality coffee cherries.

Coffee rust became a major threat to the viability of Mr. León's coffee production, with losses in his region estimated to be between 60 and 90 percent. Recognizing the threat to the livelihoods of coffee farmers nationwide, in February 2013 the president of Guatemala declared a national emergency, providing resources to combat the fungus. Feed the Future programming was already active in Guatemala's coffee value chain, and agriculture experts from across the U.S. Government have moved quickly to assist farmers in Guatemala and across the region in fighting the fungus and reducing their losses.

Fortunately for Mr. León, the Cooperativa San Pablo is receiving assistance from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) through FEDECOCAGUA, a sub-partner of ANACAFE, Guatemala's National Coffee Association. FEDECOCAGUA oversees a fair trade certified coffee value chain that supports producers from the production stage through the export of the coffee beans. Under Feed the Future, USAID supports FEDECOCAGUA to carry out a strategy to keep the disease under control and mitigate the risk of considerable losses.

The FEDECOCAGUA strategy to combat coffee rust includes fumigation brigades employing 325 local workers. Participants received training on the safe use, handling and storage of pesticides. USAID provided cooperatives with 124 motor sprayers, FEDECOCAGUA purchased necessary supplies (protective gear, pesticides, adherents, dispersants and pH conditioners) using funds received from the fair trade certification and producers paid labor costs.

This strategy supported a complete pest disease control program during 2014 that reduced the infection rate on Mr. León's farm to just 15 percent and his production losses to almost zero. "We were able to control coffee rust quickly and safely since we did not have to do it alone," he says.

Over the long term, Feed the Future's strategy to combat coffee rust in Guatemala includes replanting with new seedlings and promoting more robust pruning schedules. ANACAFE also has a new resistant coffee variety – ANACAFE 14, currently under field evaluations – in addition to several other varieties provided by the World Coffee Resource Institute at Texas A&M University.

Learn more about Feed the Future's efforts to combat coffee rust in Latin America.