



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

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Communities Share Innovative Practices that Improve Resiliency



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Extensionists gather for Buena Milpa Certification training on soil conservation in hillslope maize production systems in the Western Highlands of Guatemala.

Guatemalan people suffer the most malnutrition and stunting in the Western Hemisphere, affecting up to 67.4 percent of the population. Maize is prominent in the diet, and families often aren't able to grow and save enough to feed themselves through the year. What's more, slash-and-burn agriculture and inefficient land management have degraded 73 percent of soils in Guatemala, and climate change models predict 11 percent yield reductions.

These problems have hit farming communities using the milpa farming method of the Guatemalan Western Highlands particularly hard. The diverse microclimates of their land, with its steep slopes and small plots, require locally adapted seed varieties and carefully balanced management of natural and production-system resources.

In the Pepajau watershed, bare eroded hillslopes now give way to green plots separated by plant barriers. Three communities here worked together to address food security and climate change challenges by offering credit to simultaneously promote improved agricultural practices to enhance productivity and incentivize soil conservation practices.

The idea took off. Farmers who had adopted the minimum soil conservation practices in order to receive the credit were so happy with their results that they applied the practices to their other fields. Neighbors came by to ask how to start similar initiatives. Because they had access to a financial service that was connected to soil conservation and climate change adaptation practices, farmers could experiment and innovate with a lower risk than they usually face when changing their practices.

The Feed the Future Guatemala Buena Milpa Project (Buena Milpa) is a partnership between USAID, the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT), and diverse local partners in the Western Highlands. Buena Milpa works to inform and strengthen local networks of innovation like the one in Pepajau. Through collaborators, Buena Milpa is now preparing agricultural extension agents to work on soil conservation, community seed banks as centers for preservation and sharing of locally adapted varieties of maize, beans, and horticultural crops, and knowledge sharing on storage methods to improve seed quality and reduce post-harvest loss.

Through these informed and strengthened local innovation networks, communities are sustainably enhancing their food security, conserving soil, and preserving maize biodiversity for more resilient production systems.