

CORN STORAGE IN GUATEMALA SAVES CROPS AND BRIGHTENS LIVES

About eight years ago, Compatible Technology International initiated a program of post-harvest corn conservation in the Guatemalan Department of Jalapa, two hours by car east of Guatemala City. Cooperating with the Jalapa branch of CARE, International, we sought to reduce the staggering loss of half of the corn crop from actual harvest to human consumption. For people heavily dependent on their corn for nourishment and income, this massive loss was tragic. Our program concentrates on eliminating the main reasons for so much degradation of the corn crop – mold, rodent infestation, animal depredation, and insect attack. These all result from poor shelling, drying and storage of corn.



Accordingly, a valued CTI volunteer, retired science teacher David Elton invented a small sheller made from wood and studs. The corn cob is hand guided through a hole in the wooden device as the studs gently pry the kernels off the cob. Secondly, farmers were taught to make simple sheds which keep corn off the ground, prevent rodents through rat guards, and allow for safe drying through slats in the crib. And finally, metal silos, fabricated by local artisans whom we trained, provide reliable storage for the corn crop. These are financed through women’s micro lending programs. The \$50 cost of the silo is financed through a short-term loan. This sum in turn can be made up in about four months through savings by virtual elimination of crop loss. These simple technologies, easy to understand and apply, have great impact for the participating families.

Three years ago, CARE spun off its Jalapa branch and helped it become one of the few non-profit service organizations in Guatemala. Fundación Crysol is now a thriving entity thanks in part to CTI’s cooperation.

Thus, this effective program of crop conservation speaks to our central values: post-harvest food technologies; serving the poor; entrepreneurial development in fabrication of silos; helps thousands of women in micro-lending organizations; and assists a local organization to provide service in Guatemala.



Doña Elvira Sanchez Lemus of the hill town of Miramundo said that through this program her family now enjoys abundant, nutritious corn. She and her husband, Eliseo, do not have to buy corn from others but rather have their own surplus as a result of eliminating their previous loss.

“It’s a miracle,” she wrote. “And thanks to FOTECAP, to Crysol, and to CTI.” But thanks also to Doña Elvira and their family. They believed in the possibility of change, acted on it, and now have greater opportunities in their lives.