



Subsistence Farmers Form Export Alliance

“Don” Felician Castellanos, a subsistence farmer in Guatemala, believes it is a miracle that he survived the massacres and disappearances caused by the violent civil war that hit his region. Although he never went to school, don Feliciano knew he wanted to read and write. He taught himself to read at the age of twenty-three using an adult literacy primer.

He says his determination to build a better world for his children and grandchildren keeps him striving to get out of poverty. “We are poor and we started with nothing at all. We don’t know how to do things outside of here. We were working on the roads committee when the project people first visited us and asked if we wanted to improve our crops and learn to export directly, without the middlemen.”

It seemed like a dream. So we took the idea to the community and decided we could try. After that first meeting, we cleared and cleaned the land because we wanted to learn to grow export crops. The man [from USAID] didn’t come back for awhile. Then when he returned and saw how we improved the land, he could see we were serious and hardworking, and asked us to join the project.”

Don Feliciano participated in the USAID-funded training program that taught him how to grow better crops, pick and wash produce, meet standards, and classify and pack the beans and vegetables.



Photo: El Chap'nUSA

Don Feliciano Castellanos, director of La Estansa, (right) and Flaviano Cajti Alvarado (center) are Kaqchikel-speaking Mayans from San Martin

USAID provides funding to assist local partners to develop alliances that enhance competitiveness in areas where poverty and economic opportunity co-exist. The alliances build sustainable activities to improve infrastructure, as well as community economic and social development in post-conflict Guatemala.

Don Feliciano and fellow farmer Flaviano Cajti never dreamed of being business owners. However, with USAID assistance, they had a product that met standards for export. The next step was to form a legal business that allowed them to export their beans to foreign buyers. In Guatemala, the process for establishing a business is lengthy and costly. The farmers received a small loan to cover the costs and patiently take the legal steps that gave birth to La Estansa as a legal business.

“We took the message to our community who are poor farmers with nothing but decided to risk it. USAID trained us and now we export to Miami.”

- Don Felician Castellanos, director of La Estansa

Now don Feliciano is director of La Estansa which produces high quality vegetables that meet export standards. The company’s name is stamped on cardboard boxes used to transport the perfect green and yellow french string beans from the hills of Chimaltenango, Guatemala to Miami, directly without middlemen. Working hard with other determined community members, this opportunity has surpassed his wildest dreams about what the future would bring him, his community, and his produce.

According to don Feliciano, “Once we get La Estansa solid, we want to build the first school for 7th graders because right now our children can only go to sixth grade, no more.”

Success Story

