



## *Beekeeping for Lasting Food Security in Guatemala*

Coffee farmers in five small indigenous villages in San Juan Cotzal, Quiche, Guatemala are members of the Maya Ixil coffee cooperative. While many have historically depended on coffee for their families' livelihoods, this source of income has not allowed them to escape poverty. Each year between coffee harvests, when food stocks dwindle, food prices are high, and jobs are scarce, people experience seasonal hunger for four months.

Already in a precariously food-insecure situation, many farmers in the region have in recent years lost much of their coffee production to coffee rust fungus. The majority have resorted to leaving their farms temporarily to work on larger farms in hopes of providing for their families' basic needs.

***They say don't put all your eggs in one basket.***

***What about your coffee beans?***

39 farmers who are part of Maya Ixil are now also practicing beekeeping. The cooperative has two apiary schools with a total of 20 beehives. Here participants can learn techniques for managing hives from the co-op's apiculture technician, Domingo de la Cruz Toma. Nine new beekeepers who have joined the project this year have received materials such as stacking boxes, wax and honey mixers. Technical assistance/training is offered in setup of hives, capturing bees, honey harvesting and collection, dividing of hives, and more.

Domingo meets with each beekeeper every 20 days and continues to offer support in the areas of extracting honey, product hygiene and safety, and registration of products as needed.



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After initial business setup costs, participating farmers increased their monthly income by 23%, stating honey as their second highest income contributor after coffee. Pounds of honey produced per beekeeper has increased by more than 80% in the last two years. Maya Ixil has reported so far this year an increase in honey productivity since last year, due to trainings and ongoing technical support. A grant provided by gifts to the Presbyterian Hunger Program helped offer this technical support.



Teresa said, “My husband was desperate when we lost our coffee crop. The bees have given him and our family hope and self-esteem. I feel that my family is healthier now.” Teresa says they plan to help the community at large by providing nutritious and healthy products from the hive, like honey and pollen.

Please pray for the members of Maya Ixil. Our partner reports the challenge of climate change bringing more rain than typical, which reduces the expected volume of honey. A future hope is to set up a revolving loan fund that Maya Ixil would

manage, to provide credit for these types of activities, including growing beekeeping businesses; it requires about 25 hives for beekeeping to be truly profitable, and with little access to credit and little savings due to low coffee prices and yields, it is difficult for farmers to purchase additional supplies. There is also a need for education around nutritious food choices.



*Presbyterian gifts are supporting ministries of compassion, peace and justice around the world. Through One Great Hour of Sharing and gifts to the Presbyterian Hunger Program (PHP), we and our partners are working to alleviate hunger and eliminate its causes. One way we reach toward this goal is through grants that support partners working in their home countries to bring about transformation. In 2017, a grant from PHP to Food 4 Farmers is supporting Maya Ixil's project in Guatemala.*



Photos by Food 4 Farmers; quote from the F4F mid-year 2017 report



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