

Achuapa Transition to Organic Sesame Production (Co-operativa Juan Fransisco Paz Silva/ Pro Nica, Nicaragua)

This three-year project supports a component of a comprehensive strategy to convert the growing of sesame in the Achuapa valley from conventional methods to organic methods. It represents the initial and crucial phase of a thirteen-year plan. Through this project, seventy farmer participants will have access to on-site, tested advice and organic inputs in the first year.

Twenty five to thirty additional farmers will become involved in each of the subsequent two years. Two field trips for farmers to visit other Nicaraguan farmers who have successfully made the transition provide a valuable opportunity to develop farmer-to-farmer connections.

Since sesame is the principal cash crop in the valley, its conversion to organic will likely influence the conversion of staple crops to organic as well, as farmers experience the sustained yield and low input costs.

By engaging in this project, we become part of a movement to preserve the natural environment of a whole watershed.

The principal partner in this project is the Juan Francisco Paz Silva Multi-sectoral Co-operative. In a context that many would find discouraging, the farmer members and staff of this co-operative have built a profitable enterprise by processing sesame seeds into oil to sell to the Body Shop, as well as providing credit and other support services.

This project will build their capacity to formulate a comprehensive and concise business plan and presentation to demonstrate the profitability of their enterprise and opportunities open to clients, partners or investors. As a development partner, CFSC will assist as needed in their search for new products and markets and monitor their plan it increase the participation of women in all aspects of the operations and decision-making of the co-operative.

By the end of the project, more than eighty small farmers in the Achuapa valley will have the capacity to grow organic sesame with yields that will sustain their family income. The co-operative will have the capacity to support these and additional farmers as they make the transition to organic methods.

The co-operative will also have the capacity to process the organic product separately from the conventional product. The Achuapa farmer participants and the co-operative will have organic certification. The co-operative will be able to present the data that show its profitability and the quality of its products convincingly to prospective clients or partners.

This capacity will support its intention to diversify its client base for sesame oil and to seek out new markets for products derived from the by-products of sesame oil processing or related to skills and physical plant that they already have (neem oil, honey, soap making, etc.).