

Annual Report July 2020 - June 2021

The Tempisque Rice Project



Nov, 2020 - corn crops were destroyed by wind and flooding from hurricanes intensified by climate



Tempisque Rice could have a transformational impact on food security for subsistence farmers.

Central America is one of the most vulnerable regions in the world to extremes of weather due to climate change. In response, EPIC is engaged in a research project of an upland native rice, called Tempisque. EPIC's agricultural program partners in 4 countries - Honduras, Mexico, El Salvador, and Guatemala - have planted 111 experimental plots. The research questions are:

Can successful production be achieved without irrigation, fertilizer and pesticides?

At what elevations can this rice successfully produce?

All plots are the same size and the same seed has been planted.

In early 2020, La Semilla del Progreso had encouraged 45 Honduran farmers to try growing this unique local upland rice because it was said to be drought resistant. They had discovered it grown in just one isolated Honduran village. When Hurricanes Eta and Iota destroyed corn, vegetable and bean crops, these trial plots of Tempisque Rice still produced good harvests. It liked the extra water!

Facilitating the research, 8 EPIC program leaders from 4 countries have a WhatsApp communication system to share photos and videos of the growing rice. For farmers still planting with a hoe, digging stick, or in Mexico with horses, this has been a life changing experience. La Semilla has hired a young university graduate to organize the information that farmers provide regarding local weather conditions and growth of their rice. When the rice is harvested and weighted, she will record and compare the results of all 111 experimental plots of Tempisque rice.



Rice program director Laureano Jacobo is almost lost in this rice field, Sept. 2021

In a year of Covid, economic crisis and hurricanes - people still must eat!

One of the most important things EPiC has accomplished in the last few years has been working with our program partners to develop clusters of persons with the knowledge and ability to have resilience and hope in the face of crisis, after crisis, after crisis. These are examples:



Vegetable Production

Weather extremes alternating from droughts to hurricanes have drastically reduced food production in Central America. Also, the governments of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador have restricted travel to limit the spread of Covid, but this has caused uneven and very severe food shortages. In response, all of EPIC's agricultural programs mobilized for maximum food production. Program



participants from past years are already master gardeners and experts at seed collection and storage. Where seed was lost due to flooding, EPIC provided large quantities of vegetable seeds, some donated in the US and some bought locally. This year farmers in the Baja Verapaz Program in Guatemala grew 38,164 pounds of vegetables, enough to feed their own families and also to provide the local outdoor markets (like US farmers' markets) with many thousands of pounds of much needed locally produced food - vegetables, plus great quantities of fruit from previously planted fruit trees. The long term project work had developed the food producing capacity to respond locally in a crisis.



Chickens

Chickens die when their feathers get wet because they can't retain their body heat. Thus restoring families' flocks after the heavy rainfall caused by hurricanes was essential in a country where 2 out of 3 children suffer from malnutrition. The Baja Verapaz Program had an incubator that held 250 fertile eggs. Donations from EPIC's 2020 Christmas Wish List enabled them to buy another. When the eggs hatch in 21 days, the incubator is sterilized and refilled.

Additionally, the program was asked by Caritas (Catholic Relief Service) to provide 6,000 chicks for the hurricane response program that Caritas had in a nearby region. The Baja Verapaz staff knew which local breeds are most likely to survive and they had connections with persons who have become local chick producers, so they were able to deliver the 6,000 young chicks to Caritas and be paid for their time and transportation costs. This very successful collaboration will provide a long-term protein source for local children.





Corn and Beans

La Semilla del Progreso scrambled after Hurricanes Eta and Iota to locate local seed for replanting drowned fields of corn and beans. This was essential to preserve the generations-old local varieties so farmers were not forced to buy hybrid seeds, especially hybrid corn, from international seed companies. La Semilla was able to get these important heritage seeds because they know thousands of farmers from their years of work promoting ecological farming.

Food Distribution

In urban areas where EPIC has program partners, local families suffered serious hunger this year. Although these programs were promoting urban gardens, including roof top container gardens, the urban poor do not have enough land to produce much food. Given this situation, EPIC helped with food distribution with these program partners:

Guatemala - San Lucas Toliman

Mexico - La Buena Tierra Preschool and Primary School

Colombia - Creciendo Juntos

The photo shows a teen receiving food for his family at the Creciendo Community Center in Soacha, Colombia. Victims of drug violence and Colombia's civil war have settled here outside of Bogota.



Reliable information and masks to help prevent Covid-19



EPIC has received 4,000 high quality washable cloth masks from a generous donor, and they are being transported to projects by friends visiting Central America. So far EPIC has been able to provide masks for its Health Education for Youth program in Honduras and 3 of its larger programs in Guatemala.

The hospitals in Central America are overcome with Covid patients, and vaccination rates are very low because of lack of vaccine. All of EPIC's Latin American programs are working to provide reliable information for preventing the spread of Covid.

Programs also provide essential instruction for caring for patients at home.



The Baja Verapaz Program program has built bamboo hand-washing stations for schools, but public schools are still closed as the epidemic continues raging. In Honduras EPIC's Health Education for Youth program (left) is providing very important health information not available elsewhere for kids.



Loading the bamboo



Erosion control and water management

After recent hurricane flooding, gullies have been controlled with simple local technologies, like small rock dams. Program partners also continue to teach ways to manage water on farms. These prevent soil loss and enable rainfall to be held on the fields and soak in which provides moisture for crops in dry periods in following weeks. While social distancing, water and soil conservation work continues to be done by farmers.



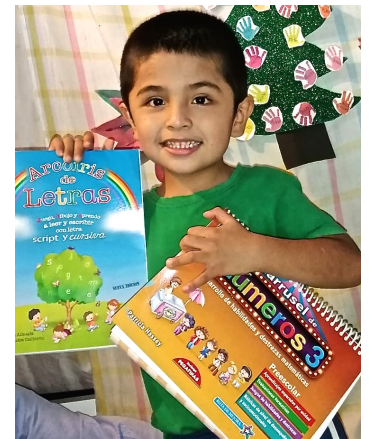
Planting trees for reforestation

Another important way to control erosion and soil loss is by planting trees. Tree planting is a major emphasis for EPIC every year. Trees are planted in reforestation projects to protect watersheds and on farms creating agroforestry projects and living fences. These trees provide lumber, firewood, and many valuable forest products. Each year hundreds of fruit trees are also planted, providing nutritious food in places where there are serious food shortages and preventing dangerous vitamin deficiencies, especially in children.

La Buena Tierra Preschool and Elementary School



In Mexico, students pre-K through 6th grade at La Buena Tierra are studying virtually via cell phones. None of their homes have computers, and for children without cell phones, the director acquired donated used cell phones. EPIC provided school kits for kindergarten students who could not afford them and some much needed scholarships for older children. Not one student dropped out all year!



Salaries for staff

It is most important to recognize that salaries continued this year as normal for all program staff supported by EPIC. This has enabled program work to continue and has maintained staff families. EPIC believes solidarity is especially important in times of crisis, and this was a year of crisis.

EPIC recognizes you, our donors, as people of hope. What we describe here is what happens when we join our hope with the hope, skill, and determination of these incredible people we call program partners. In these most challenging times of COVID and climate change, it is more important than ever to hold on to this hope. May they give you hope as you continue to support their hope.

Gratefully,

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