

Ecuador

Ecuadorian Farmer Revitalizes Cocoa Farm through SUCCESS Alliance Trainings



Tomás Gracia is a lean, agile 72-year-old man who has been farming his land for the past 40 years by applying his longtime, personal “6 to 6” rule: every day, from 6 a.m. until 6 p.m., Gracia is out working on his farm, resting only on Sundays.

Despite his dedication, Gracia was, until recently, unable to cultivate his cocoa trees to produce enough cocoa pods. His debts grew, and he had to take on an extra job to cover basic expenditures. Frustrated, Gracia began cutting down his cocoa trees.

Then Gracia met ACDI/VOCA facilitator Vicente Tenorio. Tenorio was looking for farmers to participate in a farmer field school (FFS) as part of ACDI/VOCA’s SUCCESS Alliance program in Ecuador. Recognizing the need to provide technical assistance to Ecuadorian cocoa producers, ACDI/VOCA implements a 3-year, \$5 million USDA-funded Food for Progress project to promote increased cocoa production

With SUCCESS Alliance’s help, Gracia now produces over 500 pods per tree.

through farmer training, tree rehabilitation and the development and strengthening of farmer associations. ACDI/VOCA, USDA and the World Cocoa Foundation have partnered to form the SUCCESS Alliance project in Ecuador, part of a global network of ACDI/VOCA-supported SUCCESS Alliance projects.

At their meeting, Tenorio asked Gracia to recruit other cocoa growers to start an FFS to learn new techniques to increase cocoa production and quality, thereby earning more profits. Under the SUCCESS Alliance, ACDI/VOCA and its local partners implement FFS training for 21,000 Ecuadorian cocoa producers to enable them to better cultivate their cocoa through improved disease control, crop husbandry and post-harvest processing techniques. Gracia agreed to start recruiting for the FFS.

“As soon as the FFS started and Vicente explained to us different practices to manage cocoa, I’d go back to my farm and immediately start doing them on my own trees,” Gracia said. “Three or four months later, I started to see a change on those trees. They were blooming more and bore more healthy pods than before.”

Gracia has been applying his “6 to 6” rule all of his life, but now that he participates in the SUCCESS Alliance program, he does so with



Success Story

the new technical knowledge and skills learned from ACDI/VOCA. He tends carefully to the 120 cocoa trees on his small farm, which also has various fruit trees. Each morning Gracia takes his pruning shears and handsaw to check on his cocoa trees. He cuts off any infected pods and prunes shoots or branches to prevent diseases from spreading and to protect the trees' health. Gracia also uses a sidegrafting technique learned from FFS, where he takes budwood from his best-producing trees and grafts it onto unproductive ones.

Under Gracia's care, many of the cocoa trees now bear numerous, healthy pods, including several that have produced over 500 pods each in 10 months—an impressive yield. Incredibly, the trees have the potential to produce a harvest of over 2.5 tons of dry cocoa per hectare per year.

Gracia is thankful for SUCCESS Alliance and its practical techniques, but especially for Tenorio, who has played a key role in Gracia's work. Today, Gracia no longer has to work for anybody else and has repaid all of his debts. Future plans include expanding his farm, all the while keeping to his "6 to 6" rule.

