OVERVIEW

PROGRESA II Caribe is a five-year, $9.5 million-value chain strengthening project for the cacao and livestock sectors in the Caribbean coast region of Nicaragua. Financed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), this Food for Progress program is implemented in consortium with TechnoServe and Lutheran World Relief and works with small-scale cacao producers and livestock ranchers in 14 vulnerable municipalities. PROGRESA II is unique in its dual focus on cacao agroforestry systems and sustainable livestock development, two of the most important economic sectors in the region. This combination creates complementary short-term income generating opportunities, medium- and long-term sustainable livelihood development, and natural resource preservation and regeneration. Building from the achievements of the first phase of PROGRESA, which ended in 2016, this project will have a lasting impact by developing profitable market linkages, strengthening producer cooperatives, and facilitating investment in value-adding infrastructure for both value chains.

THE APPROACH

CRS has applied a value-chain approach to its work in the first phase of PROGRESA specifically and to its work in agriculture for more than a decade, promoting engagement between and among all key actors in the supply chain to drive efficiencies and improve outcomes for producers and buyers alike. Investments are made at every stage of the supply chain: production at the farm level, quality, logistics and handling at the post-harvest level, stronger farmer enterprises and expanded links to the marketplace. CRS helps producers organize, access financial services, improve farm infrastructure and connect to buyers. As communities learn new skills, we work with leading private-sector companies committed to sustainably sourcing their products.

QUICKFACTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Type</th>
<th>Agroenterprise</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Funder/funding</td>
<td>USDA, $9.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project location</td>
<td>14 municipalities in the North Caribbean Autonomous Region (RAACAN), the South Caribbean Autonomous Region (RAACS), and the department of Río San Juan, Nicaragua</td>
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<tr>
<td># of people served</td>
<td>4247 cacao producers and livestock ranchers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Timeframe</td>
<td>2014-2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partners</td>
<td>TechnoServe; Lutheran World Relief</td>
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**Production**

PROGRESA II Caribe helps farmers boost their agricultural productivity of cacao and dairy/beef products by providing access to improved inputs such as quality seedlings, appropriate fertilizers, livestock feed and improved pasture seeds, while at the same time, conducting training in good agricultural practices and environmentally friendly techniques and technologies that help them meet the requirements of the marketplace.

The project trains producer cooperatives and their members in improved post-harvest handling techniques for cacao and dairy products. Utilizing the tested Lutheran World Relief Cacao Toolkit and building upon CRS’ previous experience working with cacao producers in Matagalpa and Siuna in phase one of the project, cacao producers learn appropriate harvest, sorting, pod splitting and transport techniques to increase the quality of their product. CRS and its partners also train producer cooperatives to improve fermenting techniques, utilize tools, such as moisture meters to ensure quality, and to dry fermented beans in sufficient quantities to meet buyer demand.

Similarly, dairy producers and cooperatives are trained in hygienic milking techniques, improved storage technologies, transport and spoilage times, and cheese production and chilling. Cooperatives are trained to test for contamination, water content and eventually milk solids composition to ensure high quality milk is delivered to buyers. The project also promotes improved post-harvest handling techniques to milk buyers, and facilitates negotiations for quality price premiums for cooperatives utilizing best practices.

Producers are also being trained to better manage their farms as a business. They learn how to keep better records, tracking the true cost of production and transportation, sales prices and volumes and ultimately the net income of their agricultural activities. They are then encouraged to adopt Farm Plans to formalize production strategies, project their income and costs, and ultimately measure their performance against pre-established farm-level targets.

**Market**

CRS facilitates partnerships with the private and the public sectors in order to increase market access and leverage investment in the cacao and livestock value chains, linking producer cooperatives to businesses and buyers that can provide productive inputs in exchange for purchase contracts, co-invest in post-harvest handling and processing facilities, and provide technical assistance to increase producer knowledge of quality standards.

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**Results to date**

- nine training events on cacao post-harvest management were held;
- 97 cacao demonstration plots have been established;
- livestock record books were implemented on 211 farms for bovine traceability and 225 farms obtained government certification in good livestock practices and were declared to be free of brucellosis and tuberculosis;
- establishment of 23 biomass production centers on 23 farms of producers with a commercial approach;
- 3,246 hectares established with improved pastures;
- production of 6,455 metric tons of conserved grass;
- feeding of 7,172 head of cattle was assured, with a ration based on 10 kilograms of silage per animal per day for a period of 90 days;
- 657 hectares under soil conservation practices, 43 conservation agriculture plots established, with an area of 21.5 hectares;
- 61 promoters-facilitators and technical teams trained on financial and farm management; and
- supported the preparation of a business plan for UCM, COMULBAN and COMUNSOL.