



COMMUNITY EXCHANGES

The good kind of envy...



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Orlando González López, promoter for the San Antonio community in Nicaragua (Municipality of Yalacagüina, Department of Madriz), has attended numerous exchange experiences with other FEDICAMP groups. He explains why exchanging knowledge between groups of farmers is not only the best way to learn and apply the best practices of others, but also to trade seeds, products, and new ideas:

“Community exchanges help us see first-hand what other groups are doing. They’re a way to find out what others

are doing better or differently from us, and how we can learn from them. Community exchanges have been an important factor in our organisation’s work.

You get a good kind of envy when you see others’ achievements, and it makes you want to find a way to do it yourself.



I've been to Cusmapa, where we cured seeds. We've gone to Estelí, and Palacagüina with several groups that work in the same organisation. We've gone to some community exchanges where we've been provided with some seed varieties, and we've taken some of our own in turn. We've exchanged products, too. I think this is one of the best ways to strengthen the groups and ourselves."

Purpose of a community exchange

Angel Ruiz Casco, Cándida Rosa González and Hector Lezama Rivera, participated in an exchange between the Río Abajo community in Yalacagüina and an organisation from Níndiri. Following are their opinions on the main goals and principles of experience

exchanges on a community level:

To learn as well as teach

"We go to learn and to teach. For example, when I went to a community exchange in Estelí with some people from around Villanueva, they demonstrated how to graft pitahaya onto a dragon-fruit cactus. I liked it, so I went and did it at home."

"Thanks to the experiences I've had in the community exchanges, I've become somewhat of an extension agent. I've brought back some of the things I've learned to my community and have taught them to other farmers who in this way benefit from the exchange as well.

“You learn a lot of things in these exchanges. In my case, I explained all about native and genetically modified seeds at CIPRES. And the more you participate in these activities that help families, the more you learn, too.

That’s the real goal of what these events are supposed to be.

There are people who come from other places and bring lots of knowledge that can be really helpful to you. You can capitalise on that.

I’ve participated in a lot of high-level forums, and though I’ve never gone to a fancy school, my schooling has come from practice, family, and interactions with people.”

“Because of climate change, things aren’t the same as they once were. Diseases are different. We need to update our knowledge, and community exchanges are good for that.”

“We’ve had international visitors. 18 students and 2 teachers came from a university in the United States. We talked about issues concerning native seeds, and we explained what our groups do. A short time ago some Vietnam veterans came, as well as some other people from Interteam in Switzerland, and people from the Zamorano. All of this is really good for learning new things and improving our ways of production.”





To see with our own eyes and put things into practice

“A community exchange is better than getting a booklet because you can see how to do something for yourself. That’s the best part of an exchange. I can look at a booklet, but I’m likely to forget.”

“I’ve been working with FEDICAMP for two years. During this time I’ve had the opportunity of participating in several community exchanges in Cusmapa and Estelí. I’ve also put into practice things like making bio-fertilisers, organic fertilisers, and crop diversification.

The good thing about community exchanges is that you go from theory to

practice, and it’s all explained in a language we can understand. If a facilitator comes, they’re just going to tell us the theory and maybe their way of explaining things isn’t easy for us to understand. But when it’s farmer-to-farmer, even if they’re from another country, we understand each other.”

To preserve our farming history and cultures

“Everyone who participates has a common goal, both visitors and hosts. We’re even going to share experiences from our own communities. There are things we need to know, like the origin and history of our community.

We live in our own country and sometimes we don't even know our own culture. With mobile phones and all that now, people don't talk to each other anymore. Our culture and traditions are being lost."

To exchange native seeds and plants

"We always exchange seeds and plants during an exchange visit. We've been given planting seeds from Matagalpa, Diriamba, and El Sauce. And some of us have travelled to El Salvador and taken some of our own seeds. Whenever we go somewhere, we take something from here and bring something different back. A little while ago we went to an exchange in El Salvador where, at the end during the seed exchange, we took Catacama and Quebrachito maize seeds (local varieties). Nobody there knew about them. We also took Sebaqueña onion seeds (local variety). People really liked them and we tried to make sure everyone got some, and they gave us seeds from over there that we didn't know about either."

To make friendships and create commercial ties

Many times during these exchanges, visiting and host families develop a friendship that lasts for years, and frequently continue to visit each other.

Commercial ties can also be established, based on trading food or products from one family to another.

Step by step: Organising a community exchange

1. Contact the community you want to visit

- ✓ Find a community that has had successful experiences in the issues you are interested in, and that can fulfil visitors' expectations.

2. Organise a group of visitors

- ✓ The group should have a maximum of 15 to 20 people and consist of 50% women and 50% men.
- ✓ Participants should be enthusiastic and eager to improve.
- ✓ Motivation is vital to the success of the exchange.
- ✓ Participants should be prepared and have their questions ready.
- ✓ Responsibilities should be established from within the group.

3. Prepare the hosts

- ✓ The community promoters should choose which families are going to share their experience, which families will help with meal preparation, and who will provide lodging if the visitors are to stay overnight.

4. Set the program agenda

- ✓ Prepare the agenda for the visit and assign responsibilities.

Activity	Organiser
Introduction of visiting group	Someone from the visiting group
Introduction of host families	Local promoter
Explanation of the family's experience	A member of the host family
Tour of the plot	
Explanation of the practice	Someone from the family explains how the practice was done and what materials were used
Conclusion on the results of the practice	Visitors ask questions about the practice
Visitors' and hosts' commitment to responsibilities	Promoters and facilitators write down the commitments of visitors and hosts
Farewell	

Costs

Costs vary widely according to number of people, duration, and site of the exchange. You can estimate an average cost of \$20 USD per person per day.

- ✓ Follow-up should be done on these individual commitments.
- ✓ The exchange should be between communities with similar conditions and issues.

Recommendations

- ✓ Visitors must be chosen wisely, as they must commit to putting into practice what they learned on the visit.
- ✓ Technicians should be "invisible" during the visit. The exchange is between farmers, facilitated by the promoters.

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