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Cultivating Crops *and* Care: The 'Lifelong Effects and Benefits' of Education

As off-shore melon production continues in January, the New Year also marks a return to school for the children of seasonal workers in Honduras and Guatemala. With Fyffes counting among its core values a focus on providing academic development for local children, we take a closer look at the investments the global produce leader is making in its farming communities.

Financial Assistance & School Supplies

Fyffes in 2016 launched a program that incentivizes children of its seasonal workers with school supplies based upon academic progress. Via this program, Fyffes works with teachers to identify the supplies most in demand—including shoes, uniforms, backpacks and more—as well as how best to target improving student-achievement levels.

“This program has generated [academic] competition among students so they can be considered,” said Maria Concepcion Estrada, director at 100-plus student Ramon Villeda Morales elementary school in the village of La Permuta in Honduras. “[It also] has contributed to our school not having any dropouts or students failing to pass from one grade to the next.”

And it’s having an impact on family budgets: “The money we would have spent on these supplies we can now use to buy provisions and other things we need at home,” said Selvin Erazo, who has worked with Fyffes farms for more than 15 years and has a 7-year-old daughter attending school.

Fyffes also works in coordination with “[Plan International](#),” an independent development and humanitarian organization that during the course of four decades has advanced children’s rights for more than 35,000 families. And financial assistance has included paying teachers’ wages and contributing to local Children’s Day and Mother’s Day celebrations on an annual basis.

“By working together with Fyffes, we are able to expand our impact by benefiting more children,” said Francis Ardón of Plan International in Honduran Choluteca. “If we work together, we can contribute more to the communities.”

In neighboring Guatemala, Fyffes has been supporting the academic experience for students since 2015 through its “FUNDASOL” foundation. Each year, more than 650 students attending 30-plus schools reap the benefits of FUNDASOL’s educational initiative, which include providing students with much-needed school supplies and new desks; staffing teachers to lead vital courses that include English, psychology and computer science; and improving the learning environment by way of repainting schools, improving restrooms and updating sporting facilities.

“A core focus of our mission is to be an empowering force in the communities in which we operate,” said Fyffes Global Sustainability Director Julie Cournoyer. “This includes everything from providing well-rounded education, to funding teacher salaries and improving living conditions for families.”

Infrastructure Upgrades

Cognizant of the value of a proper academic environment, Fyffes also is working to improve safety, hygiene and overall learning conditions for students in elementary schools adjacent to its farms.

In the Honduran villages of El Naranjal and Pueblo Nuevo, for example, Fyffes has replaced latrines with proper toilets to reduce exposure to gastrointestinal illnesses common in the region, which in turn improves classroom attendance.

Fyffes also has built perimeter fences to improve security around schools and has upgraded electrical power systems. “With the fence that Fyffes built, we now are safer and can better maintain order,” said Amanda Lastenia Cruz Aguilar, director of the Porfirio Maldonado School in Pueblo Nuevo. “I can now close the gate and feel at ease teaching the students because we can control access to the school, which we could not do before.”

“These children represent the future, so it’s very important to Fyffes that we affect positive influence on these kids from a very early age,” said Cournoyer. “School supplies, building infrastructure, security—we recognize and support how crucial all of these factors are toward a successful learning environment.”

On-Site School Medical Care

Dr. Osorio, a native of Nicaragua who has lived in Honduras for more than three decades, is one of four doctors who runs clinics at melon farms in Honduras. Through this Fyffes-directed and -funded program, he provides check-ups, vaccinations and medicine at no charge to elementary school students, and also counsels parents on the medical benefits of good hygiene in the home.

“The program has been very impactful, as children at these schools are above average when it comes to their health and even their levels of alertness in class,” said Dr. Osorio. “By providing checkups and medicine, our mission is to attract more children to the school and to keep them healthy.”

While Dr. Osorio treats about 15 current students each visit—administering everything from vitamins to deworming medications—his weekly roll call also includes check-ups for children not even attending the school.

“Parents are grateful for the different ways Fyffes is helping our school,” said Luis Alonso Cruz Lopez, president of the Pueblo Nuevo community board in Honduras. “Our children and their parents, many of whom work with Fyffes, are much happier. Most importantly, the children are safer and healthier.”

Now in his fifth year, Dr. Osorio thinks about how to build on the success of the Fyffes medical program. “People in other communities are already inquiring about having a similar program for their own schools,” he said. “We are always exploring ways to contribute to the communities, and I am happy to be a part of this program.”

“Both educating and improving the health conditions of our children is so important for the future of these communities,” added Cournoyer, Fyffes global sustainability director. “We’re talking about lifelong effects and benefits, and that’s an effort Fyffes is so eager to be spearheading!”

For more on how Fyffes is fostering positive change for its seasonal workers, their families, local communities and the environment, please visit the [“Fyffes and the Community”](#) page at [Fyffes.com](#).

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About Fyffes

Fyffes is one of the largest and oldest tropical produce importers and distributors in Europe. With an infrastructure that reaches across the globe, Fyffes is truly a global player, primarily involved in the production, procurement, shipping, ripening, distribution and marketing of bananas, pineapples, melons and more recently mushrooms. For over 130 years, Fyffes has been committed to bringing the world the highest quality products, inspiring people to feel excitement about our brands and making a positive difference for our growers, our employees, our customers, consumers and environment. Today, Fyffes is the largest importer of bananas in Europe, and the No. 1 importer of off-shore melons in North America. In addition to tropical fruit, Fyffes is the third largest producer of mushrooms in North America. Discover more about Fyffes at [Fyffes.com](https://www.fyffes.com).

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