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Cultivating Crops and Care: Fyffes Aids Melon Workers During Off-Season

When the calendar turns to November, the melons hit the U.S. market, as this month marks the arrival into North America of melons grown off-shore in Honduras and Guatemala. Indeed, the return of growing season in the Central American region at summer's end means a lot for the well-being of local farming communities in Honduras and Guatemala, as the agricultural off-season can be a challenging time for seasonal workers seeking to supplement earnings.

Fyffes knows that it's the local farmers who play the foundational role in supplying produce to consumers across the globe, and it's a big reason why Fyffes is so keen to offer year-round support and opportunities to its workers and their families. These initiatives are aimed at providing an off-season source of income to improve both the quality and variety of food available to Fyffes sourcing regions. With the off-shore melon season upon us, we take a closer look at the company's investment to cultivate sustainable food programs in Honduras and Guatemala...

A Corn-Planting Program

Since 2014, Fyffes has sponsored a program providing acres of land on which its seasonal workers can plant and cultivate corn toward greater food availability for both its own growing communities, as well as less-privileged local residents. "The well-being of our employees and of the communities in which we operate is a Fyffes core value," said Fyffes North America President Enda Walsh. "We are always exploring ways in which to partner with communities who face challenges."

In 2018, Fyffes not only shared acres of land in Honduras to enable dozens of its workers to plant corn but also provided the husking equipment, irrigation sources, necessary fuel and even on-site technical expertise to make the most of caring for the crops. All the better: Through this reciprocal partnership, local farmers donated a percentage of the corn crop to local families in need, including the ill, the elderly and single-parent families. Selvin Erazo, a program participant and Fyffes seasonal worker for more than 15 years, is thankful: "There are many of us farmers who do not have land, but the company has given us this possibility."

Local Honduran community-board president Luis Alonso Cruz echoed similar gratitude for the Fyffes program: "We like the fact that this benefits entire communities and not just the employees who participate."

Organizing Family Orchards

In early 2018, Fyffes partnered with the Honduran chapter of non-profit [Amigos de la Tierra](#) ("Friends of the Earth") to engage community-board presidents in five neighboring villages with a plan to develop family orchards as a way to alleviate hunger, provide a source of supplemental income, and improve the quality and variety of foods consumed.

Via this initiative, Fyffes local subsidiaries provided communities with water barrels and the equipment used for the orchards' irrigation systems, as well as the technical expertise to properly create and maintain the healthiest plant beds. These "family orchards" have provided

redeeming success stories for residents seeking to gain access to food sources during the harvest off-season.

“With the orchard, our family no longer must buy vegetables at the market because we grow our own, which not only saves money but also allows us to eat better,” said Delmis Garcis, who alongside her husband has raised everything from carrots and cucumbers, to beans and sweet potatoes with a year-round crop rotation behind their home. The family has maintained the orchard since 2011 and even has sold excess crops in their local marketplace as a complementary income source.

“Creating these family orchards is a sustainable solution for some of the off-season’s challenges that our farming communities face,” said Fyffes Global Sustainability Director Julie Cournoyer. “We are particularly encouraged by programs that can benefit groups that are not as easily employable, such as senior citizens—a core value of Fyffes.”

Trading Hand Tools for Tractors

Farmers who own land in the vast regions neighboring Fyffes farms are benefiting from a program that provides Fyffes-owned tractors to plow fields that otherwise would be tilled by hand. Farmers say the program has resulted not only in a much lesser physical strain but also in increased crop yields that are helping to keep alive the local independent farming tradition.

Via this program, local Fyffes operators lend tractors and modern plowing equipment to farmers at no cost, enabling them to till hundreds of acres of farmland in a matter of days (versus a much more time-consuming effort utilizing traditional hand tools). This is especially pertinent in Honduran regions prone to extensive dry spells, when farmers need to act quickly in making the most of infrequent summer rains that soften soil for plowing and planting. The result is a strong and “deep rooted” variety of local food staples that include corn, chayote, sorghum, cassava and beans that are both consumed at home and sold at market as an additional income source.

Longtime farmer and program participant Luis Arnaldo Carranza explained it this way: “When we use regular [hand] tools, it takes a lot longer to till the soil, [and] we also get lower crop yields because we can’t plow as deeply to plant the seeds. [With the use of tractors] the roots can grow much deeper, which makes the plants stronger and gives us better results.”

Lazaro Medina is another veteran Honduras-based grower who appreciates the no-cost use of Fyffes farming equipment: “Our children see that the land is in better condition and can come help....even if they do it somewhat reluctantly,” he says with a smile as he looks upon his son, who works in transportation services for Fyffes.

“As a produce company, we are well aware of the challenges independent farmers face, and we’re pleased to help some of them improve their working conditions while increasing crop yields,” added Cournoyer. “It ultimately translates into greater well-being for all.”

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. Celebrating its 130th anniversary in 2018, 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 people, 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

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