



## IN THE CLIMATE CRISIS, NEW VOCATIONS OFFER YOUNG FARMERS A LIFELINE

Persistent drought and powerful storms are putting farm families in Central America at risk; Oxfam partners are helping young adults find a new path forward.

BY TANIA MORENO | SPRING 2022

“Everything in life has its time and season,” says Dinora Aranda to her students. “This certainly is true in the kitchen.”

With that, she launches into a lesson on making pizza.

Laid out before her are flour, eggs, yeast, onions, green chilies, ham, cheese, and a gourd full of water, and gathered around the table are 16 young adults from the town of San Simon in El Salvador.

Aranda’s talk of time and seasons may be a reference to choosing the freshest ingredients, but perhaps she is also pointing out that her students are entering a new season of their lives. Most of them are farmers, and the lives of their families have been rocked by the climate crisis.

They live in what’s known as the Dry Corridor of Central America, where year after year their crops wither and die, or take a pounding from increasingly violent storms.

Now, they are learning how to make a living as bakers, and Aranda, who runs a pizza shop out of her house, is lending a hand.

“Many young adults here can’t find work and are forced to migrate,” says Francisco Magaña Solís, project coordinator at Oxfam in El Salvador.

So, Oxfam is supporting the Salvadoran organization Fundación Campo (FC) to help young adults create more sustainable livelihoods.

“We are training young people in trades by providing vocational workshops,”

Inmer Argueta, an FC technician, explains to a visitor. “We also give them training in entrepreneurship.”

The bakery school is nothing fancy—just a room in Aranda’s house. But that may be an advantage: it makes it easy for her students to envision running a business like this from their homes.

### A DREAM THAT MAY COME TRUE

Dolores Hernández is one of the bakers in training.

She is a 27-year-old farmer who lives in a small village in Cantón Carrizal with her partner, and they have two young children. They grow what they can, do odd jobs, and hire themselves out as farm laborers;

but their weekly income is barely enough to live on, so when crops fail, they sometimes go hungry.

Still, Hernández finds the energy to do what matters most to her. She cares for her family, takes part in her community's civil protection committee, serves as president of the village health committee—and drives home goals as a forward on her community's soccer team.

Now, a new kind of goal is coming into focus.

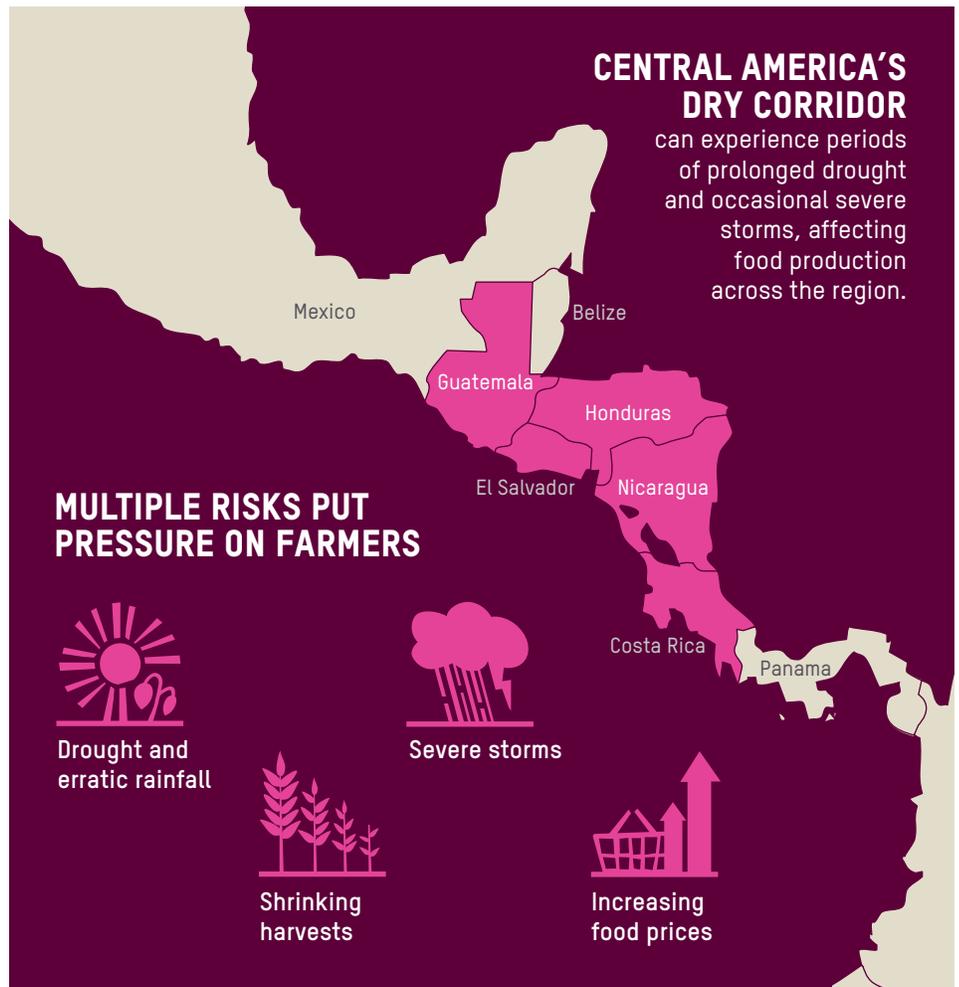
"We are a group of farmers who want to prepare and sell desserts," she says. "We see it as a good opportunity, because in this area there is no business of this type, and there is a great demand for bread and cakes. My dream is to have a business run by women."

## REDUCING RISKS, STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS

Aranda is helping her students develop their home baking skills into professional expertise, and Oxfam and FC will give the women a hand along the way, providing tools, supplies, and technical support.

Baking isn't the only trade on offer. In El Salvador, Oxfam and partners are also helping young women and men learn cosmetology, cellphone repair, and computer science. A parallel project in Guatemala focuses on baking, tailoring, and motorcycle maintenance. There are more than 140 participants in the two countries.

"Extreme weather in the Dry Corridor is destroying crops year after year," says Omar Ramirez Rivera, project officer at Oxfam in Guatemala. "Whether farmers try to survive on the land or take their chances with migration, they face huge risks to their health and safety. Their best hope is to find alternate sources of income."



SOURCE: Integrated Phase Classification, <https://www.ipcinfo.org/>.

"Already, graduates of our trainings are starting businesses and finding employment in their new fields," he says.

Meanwhile, Oxfam aims to help partner organizations in both countries strengthen their ability to lead disaster-related projects and programs. "Local organizations have the knowledge and networks and relationships that count most in emergencies," says program manager Angel Marcos. "Building a safer future means supporting their leadership."

## "MY LIFE IS GOING TO GET BETTER"

Later, when Aranda called Hernández forward, she gave her instructions on

kneading the dough to a smooth consistency. The other students watched carefully before taking their turns. Then they prepared the toppings, and Aranda and Hernández slid the pizza into the oven. Minutes later, when the cheese had melted and the crust was a perfect golden brown, they pulled it out, and everyone cheered.

Hernández was pleased, and not just with their tasty lunch. She has a powerful motivation to become a successful businesswoman, and the pathway forward is becoming clear.

The future is looking hopeful, she says. "I know my life is going to get better."



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