



## “IT GIVES ME HOPE AND JOY”

In the face of persistent drought in El Salvador, homemade organic fertilizer and pesticides are boosting harvests while protecting the environment.

BY ELIZABETH STEVENS | WINTER 2021

Pesticide never looked so delicious. And these days, a gathering of farmers in El Salvador may not often look so cheerful.

Five years of drought have left subsistence farmers in Central America struggling to feed their families and hang onto their farms. But on a February morning at the Oxfam field school in Chilamo, San Antonio, farmers entertained out-of-town guests, and the mood was optimistic.

“The harvest last season was excellent. Bigger than we expected,” said farmer Nicolas Aguilar Guevara. “Each member harvested about 100 pounds of corn.”

The centerpiece of the field school is a parcel of land on a steep hillside where participants experiment with farming techniques that could help them adapt to the changing climate. Oxfam and partner

CORDES (Foundation for Cooperation and Community Development in El Salvador) are providing technical support and sharing our knowledge, including recipes for organic inputs. The project is part of a multifaceted risk-reduction program focused on a region of the country known as the Dry Corridor that’s faced more than its share of hazards and hardship.

As Aguilar Guevara spoke with visitors, his family and neighbors chopped onions, chili peppers, and garlic for their spicy pesticide. Bottles of corn alcohol, homemade banana vinegar, and molasses sat beside them, waiting for the final mix.

“The pesticide we make is cheaper and more effective than the chemicals we could buy,” he said.

“Now, we don’t have to spend money buying chemical pesticides that degrade our soil,” said neighbor Sebastián Escobar.

### TAKING CARE OF THE LAND AND ONE ANOTHER

Next to the pesticide operation at the field school is a tall sack of *bokashi*, an organic fertilizer the farmers also made here. This recipe included chicken and cow manure, rice husks, charcoal, ash, and molasses, as well as some dark earth—rich in microorganisms—that’s found nearby.

“Chemical fertilizer disappears when it rains,” says Aguilar Guevara, “but *bokashi* stays put and helps retain moisture in the soil.”

“Using all those chemicals was hurting the land,” says Escobar. “Now we are taking



care of the land and using organic products and fertilizer. It gives me hope and joy. It is part of taking care of everyone.”

As spring ushered in the planting season, with it came COVID-19. The coronavirus put farmers’ health at risk, and quarantines aimed at curtailing the pandemic cut off access to incomes they depended on.

“These are hard times for farmers in El Salvador, but the field school has helped people learn to grow more food for less money,” says Oxfam community-preparedness program manager Ángel Marcos. Improved yields and inexpensive homemade inputs, in other words, are more essential than ever to keeping families afloat.

“And the school has had a less tangible result,” he adds. “The farmers now have an effective support network. The COVID crisis and quarantines can leave people feeling scared, isolated, and discouraged, but members of the field school are a team. They are facing the crisis as a community.”



## MEETING CRITICAL PANDEMIC NEEDS IN EL SALVADOR

Since the start of the COVID-19 crisis, Oxfam in El Salvador has been working closely with partner organizations to help families and communities protect themselves from the virus and meet other critical needs in the face of the multiyear drought that preceded the pandemic, massively destructive tropical storms, and a spike in cases of gender-based violence accompanying the coronavirus pandemic.

In addition to helping farmers weather drought, Oxfam and our partners have been collaborating on the following projects:

### GETTING THE WORD OUT:



Launched a public information campaign that has reached hundreds of thousands of people.



Supporting a call center offering advice about staying safe and protecting rights.

### PROMOTING LIFESAVING HYGIENE:



Installing/repairing water and sanitation facilities.



Distributing hygiene materials like soap and other essential aid items.

### SUPPORTING FAMILIES IN NEED:



Supporting the government in managing shelters for displaced families.



Providing cash to survivors of gender-based violence and to families affected by flooding and loss of incomes.

LEFT: At the field school, homegrown pesticides include onions, chili peppers, garlic, corn alcohol, banana vinegar, and molasses. “Now, we don’t have to spend money buying chemical pesticides that degrade our soil,” says farmer Sebastián Escobar. *Elizabeth Stevens/Oxfam America*



## DO ONE MORE THING TODAY

Thanks to your support in 2020, we mounted a global response to the COVID-19 pandemic while continuing our other poverty-fighting initiatives and emergency programs around the world. We could not have done it without you! We appreciate your commitment and continued support in 2021. To learn more about some of our accomplishments in 2020, which you made possible, visit [oxfamamerica.org/2020TopTen](https://oxfamamerica.org/2020TopTen).



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