

Mercy Corps Agriculture Programs

Reducing Hunger, Increasing Income, and Improving Nutrition

We live in a world where 2.8 billion people—nearly half of the population—survive on less than \$2 a day and an estimated 850 million people are undernourished.¹ This is partly the result of the multiple challenges that global agriculture needs to address - encouraging overall economic development and poverty alleviation; recognizing and helping to manage increased competition for alternative uses of land and water resources; adapting to extreme weather events due to climate change; and contributing to biodiversity preservation and fragile ecosystem restoration—all while meeting the nutritional needs of an increasingly affluent and growing world population. Promoting agricultural systems that combine economic growth, nutritional diversity, and agricultural productivity will increase the resilience of the communities with whom we work, and help alleviate poverty, hunger and malnutrition.

Mercy Corps adopts a holistic approach to agriculture to ensure agro-systems are economically productive, nutritionally diverse and efficient, both today and in the future.² With the goal of improving the lives and livelihoods of those in agricultural value chains, including smallholder farmers and pastoralists, Mercy Corps' agricultural interventions are designed to favorably impact populations on three fronts:

- better functioning, pro-poor markets;
- improved productivity; and
- diversified and nutrient-rich diet.

Mercy Corps' agricultural programs are valued today at more than USD \$200 million and implemented in 27 countries. Coupled with a broad range of complementary interventions such as financial services, health and nutrition, and conflict management, they contribute to improving economic development and food and nutrition security. Programs with an emphasis on livestock value chains represent over one third of Mercy

Corps' agricultural programs and operate in varied environments—from the drylands of Africa, to the steppes of Mongolia and the mountains of Afghanistan. Other agricultural subsectors, in addition to those focusing on cereals and horticultural products, include spices in Asia and tree crops in Latin America and Asia. Mercy Corps is also the agriculture lead within the USAID-funded Technical and Operational Performance Support (TOPS) program, a Food for Peace knowledge management coordination platform for all partners engaged in Food for Peace programs.



Mercy Corps' livestock program in Georgia - Calf cooperative in Ptana Village, Georgia, breeding livestock using artificial insemination techniques. Photo: J. Austin for Mercy Corps

Strengthening Market Efficiency

Based on Mercy Corps' resilience principles, which recognize that addressing the root causes of poverty requires a systems approach, Mercy Corps acts as a market facilitator to engage a wide range of stakeholders to analyze and overcome the constraints that prevent the poor from participating efficiently in agricultural market systems. For example, in Nepal, Mercy Corps is strengthening all levels of the ginger value chain with a specific focus on increasing the efficiency of the input supply chain and maximizing harvest incomes. In Georgia, based on the results of in-depth assessments that identified artificial insemination as the key to increasing livestock productivity, Mercy Corps

¹ "The State of Food Insecurity in the World" (FAO 2012)

² The term "agriculture" encompasses crop cultivation, livestock production, forestry and fisheries across a wide range of ecosystems and landscapes.

supports 9,000 small livestock owners increase the productivity and value of their cattle through increased availability of those services. In Indonesia, Uganda, and Zimbabwe, Mercy Corps is increasing access to financial services through the "bundling" of affordable, fee-for-service, farm and crop management tools with financial services using mobile phones. By building the financial and technological capacity at agent network and farmer levels, Mercy Corps promotes mass uptake of commercially viable agricultural services. Finally, in northern Uganda, Mercy Corps uses a \$1.65 million "Karamoja Innovation Fund" to provide matching grants, loan guarantees, and equity stakes to strengthen market solutions for the provision of goods and services critical to the program's food security and agriculture goals, such as tillage services and agro-processing.

Increasing Productivity Now and Tomorrow

Mercy Corps' successful strategy for sustainable agricultural productivity growth lies in significant improvements in farming practices and post-harvest methods, the introduction of innovative low-cost technologies, and better management of natural resources and biodiversity. To prepare producers to withstand weather-related and economic stresses and become more resilient, Mercy Corps promotes proven agricultural practices, adapted to each context, that are climate-smart, energy-efficient, and agro-ecologically sound. Among these practices are the adoption of improved seed storage by over 40,000 producers in Timor Leste; a more efficient management of herds and resources along the transhumance corridors in Kenya and Mali; farmer-managed natural regeneration of trees in Niger; and conservation agriculture techniques in Zimbabwe. In Haiti and China, Mercy Corps focuses its efforts on watershed management and agro-forestry to enhance income and food security while protecting long-term natural resources. Recognizing that land tenure issues are another critical element of productivity and resilience, in 2009, Mercy Corps founded Red Tierras, a land network in Latin America to resolve land disputes and secure land tenure for indigenous, Afro-descendent and small-scale farmers.



Mercy Corps' ginger program in Nepal. Photo: Miguel Samper for Mercy Corps.

Diversifying Diets & Boosting Nutrition

Recognizing that agricultural investments targeted toward smallholder farmers are more likely to succeed if they address human capital constraints due to malnutrition, Mercy Corps encourages the application of a "nutrition lens" when designing its agricultural interventions to increase access to diverse, safe and affordable foods.³ This strategy aims to maximize the impact of agriculture on nutritional outcomes. In Niger and the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mercy Corps' programs empower women and girls to understand appropriate nutritional practices and teaches them to produce nutritious foods to improve the diet and nutritional status of their children. In Guatemala and Nicaragua, in partnership with Green Mountain Coffee Roasters and the Coffeelands Food Security Coalition, Mercy Corps' agricultural interventions strengthen both the income of coffee farmers to purchase nutritious food and the production of diverse food for consumption.

CONTACT

General Inquiries

Sandrine Chetail, Senior Advisor Agriculture & Food Security schetail@hq.mercycorps.org

Mercy Corps Global Headquarters

45 S.W. Ankeny Street
Portland, OR 97204
503.896.5000
800.292.3355
mercy Corps.org

³ A GAIN study shows that 1% decrease in height due to stunting leads to a 1.4% reduction in productivity