



**FOOD FOR
THE HUNGRY**



COTZAL, GUATEMALA
YEAR END REPORT
DECEMBER 2020

PREPARED BY
**Food for the Hungry (FH) Guatemala
& Food for the Hungry (FH) Canada**

INTRODUCTION



 LOCATION	Acul (Nebaj)	Rio Azul, Xonca, Villa Hortensia II (Nebaj)	Cotzal
 OPENED/GRAD TARGET	2013/2026	2009/2021	2019/2029
 # OF COMMUNITIES	1	3	9
 FAMILIES	684	721	2,516
 POPULATION	3,252	3,496	13,002

Food for the Hungry (FH) Guatemala walks with the communities in the Nebaj and Cotzal regions. In Nebaj, FH partners with Rio Azul, Villa Hortensia II, Xonca, and Acul on their daily journey out of poverty and toward sustainability. In Cotzal, FH partners with 9 communities still in the starting years of partnership—Chichel, Chisis, Los Angeles, Ojo de Agua, Quisis, San Felipe Chenla, Santa Avelina, Tixelap, and Vichibala.

With an emphasis on increasing child nutrition, boosting community health, multiplying livelihood opportunities, and strengthening local leadership, your support empowers FH Canada’s work with 3,921 families to help them achieve their vision for their communities.

This year has been heavily influenced by the effects of COVID-19, primarily due to the restrictive measures taken by the government. **FH Guatemala adapted to remote work for staff (from home), while continuing to maintain weekly contact with leaders (community and church) and groups (such as Cascade health groups and Savings and Loans groups).** The team also spent a lot of time in prayer and reflection as well as extended web-based meetings to adapt their activities and to develop new strategies to help families in Guatemala recover from the significant secondary impacts of the pandemic.

Although these secondary impacts are slow moving, regular monitoring shows a deterioration of food and nutritional security (already a problem before the pandemic), and significant income decreases, in addition to the unknown impact of the loss of an entire year of learning for school children.

COVID-19 UPDATE

As soon as the country went into lockdown, FH Guatemala pivoted to open up a remote communication channel with impacted families. In each of the communities, a weekly phone call was set up with community and church leaders, local educational representatives, and volunteer mothers. This provided the team with knowledge of the state of the community in the midst of the pandemic and helped them develop new methodologies and strategies to support partner communities.

During June, Cajas de Amor—“Boxes of Love” emergency aid kits—were delivered to the most vulnerable families in partner communities, with the support of the Leader Mothers and community and church leaders. According to the families, the assistance has been a blessing, since most of them live in extreme poverty including some elderly people who live alone. It was wonderful to see a smile on the faces of the people who received these kits.

Families Per Community Who Received Cajas de Amor	
Community Name	# of Families
Acul	100
Chichel	22
Chisis	10
Los Angeles	40
Ojo de Agua	40
Quisis	10
Rio Azul	80
San Felipe Chenta	40
Santa Avelina	80
Tixelap	40
Vichibala	40
Villa Hortensia II	40
Xonca	65
TOTAL	607

“I always wanted someone to help me strengthen my knowledge and responsibility. As a parent, sometimes one only thinks about personal things and the community is forgotten. As community leaders, we are sometimes unaware of the role that we play. Thanks to FH for having the initiative to give us the knowledge. We have a responsibility to serve people in the community.”

— Mr. Domingo Sajic, **President of the Community Development Council in the Quisis Community**

Hurricane Update

As of December 2020, two major hurricanes—Eta, followed by Iota—swept violently through Guatemala, tearing apart communities with torrential rain and horrific flooding. More than 2,300 families in partner communities across Guatemala have been impacted.

In FH Canada partner communities, the team distributed food and emergency survival packs to 181 families. Villa Hortensia II was hit the hardest, in part due to its remote, mountainous location. Most families were displaced from their homes and the roads were decimated, so FH’s response has relied on creative collaboration with community leaders, and even the use of helicopters to deliver much-needed supplies.

The full impact of these hurricanes is yet to be seen and a long-term response is currently being drafted by the teams on the ground. Full recovery could take several years, and as that process is assessed, FH will continue helping communities get back on track.



EDUCATION

FH education facilitators help children stay in school in part by making regular visits to their homes to encourage families on the benefits of education. In response to schools closing in March due to COVID-19, education facilitators persevered in making regular calls to teaching staff as well as parents. Maintaining this regular communication encouraged caregivers to continue their children's education at home, in accordance with the guidance provided by the Ministry of Education.

“My life has changed in a great way, since FH came to my community, through the training that they gave me in elementary school, middle school, and now through [ongoing] programs. It has benefited my life in the emotional, physical, and especially spiritual ways.”

— Petrona Bernal, **Grade 11, Xonca**

During the lockdown, some middle school students were able to do some school work assigned to them remotely. In the communities of Rio Azul, Xonca, Villa Hortensia II, and Acul, FH staff monitored these students in order to motivate them to continue learning, to hand in assignments, and to check in on how their learning process is going. The young people received encouragement through phone calls and sometimes via WhatsApp in “trusting and hoping in God.”

FH's education team plays an important role in supporting families with school-aged children through a range of challenging situations. For example, during the first week of May, seven children in Villa Hortensia II suddenly lost their mother. FH staff coordinated the delivery of necessities to support the father and the children. The education facilitator also made phone calls to encourage and pray with the family.

SOUP FOR KIDS REPORT

FH Canada makes annual shipments of dried soup mix to Guatemala to bolster their school meal programs with highly nutritious food. When schools closed in response to the nationwide COVID-19 lockdown, FH worked with the Ministry of Education to distribute 96 bags of soup in Villa Hortensia II and 240 bags in Rio Azul. Bags of dried soup mix were given directly to parents through teachers living in the communities. In this way, FH supported families so that children would not suffer from hunger as a result of the pandemic. Each family received one bag of dehydrated soup, with the exception of very large families who received two bags.



Phither and his brother are joined by an FH staff to enjoy fun yet educational activities.



HEALTH

CASCADE GROUPS

The FH team provided follow-up and support to each of the Leader Mothers of community Cascade health groups by making phone calls and sending messages via WhatsApp. **In response to this difficult time, the Leader Mothers continued to courageously make a difference in their communities' health.** They persisted in visiting the members of their Cascade groups, taking care to follow COVID-19 safety protocols. They taught on critical health topics related to preventing the spread of the virus, such as effective handwashing, the proper wearing of masks, physical distancing, and hygiene as well as general health practices for mothers like exclusive breastfeeding and good nutrition.

“Children are a gift from God and they must be healthy, practice hygiene habits, and eat healthy food.”

— Phither, **7-years-old, Acul**

As a result, the virus has been kept at bay, women continued to receive critical health support, and Leader Mother's gained confidence in their own ability to overcome new challenges. The Leader Mothers expressed gratitude for the follow-up and emotional support they received from the FH team.

GROWTH MONITORING & PROMOTION OF CHILDREN

Growth Monitoring and Promotion teams support mothers with children under five years of age to check their children's weight and height, in order to identify nutritional deficiencies and address them. The first five years of a child's life are critical to establishing their lifelong mental and physical health, development,



Handwashing is one of the simplest and most powerful ways to prevent the spread of all kinds of diseases, including COVID-19.

“I was very sad and worried about the confinement, but thanks to the calls I received from the [FH] facilitator and the words that God gave me, I began to regain strength and trust in God.”

— Amelia de León Sánchez, **Acul**

and resilience. The Ministry of Health in Guatemala considers this to be an essential service and so has continued this support at Community Health Centres.

In some communities, volunteer mothers on the teams are able to support health professionals as they weigh and measure children, always respecting the safety measures to avoid any spread of COVID-19. But even where the volunteers are unable to attend, they continue to encourage mothers with young children to attend monthly weight sessions. Catching and mitigating malnutrition early means improving the lifelong health of these children, and the generations to come.



Distribution of Fraser Valley Gleaners' dried soup mix helped many families get through hungry times during the COVID-19 lockdown.



LIVELIHOODS

SAVINGS GROUPS

There are 10 active Savings and Loans groups across Acul, Rio Azul, Xonca, and Villa Hortensia II; groups have not been established in the new Cotzal communities. Throughout the lockdown, text messages were sent in the local language (Ixil) to encourage group leaders to seek God at this time and not to be discouraged. The messages touched on topics such as stewardship, reflection, supportive relationships, leadership, transparency, and discipline. **Savings groups were able to provide solutions to problems of their members including interest-free loans, repayment extensions, and new business ideas.** They were encouraged to continue tracking funds, to hold meetings (following regulations) when possible, and to follow COVID-19 safe practices.

The greenhouse built and supported by the Acul platform of women has five varieties of vegetables growing, which they plan to sell in local markets in the months to come. They are growing cabbages, broccoli, cauliflower, jalapeño peppers, and bell peppers.

“[One day] I would like to see in my community an artisan market, to have access to handmade fabrics such as Guipil, [to sell] our typical belts, among other things!”

— Juliana, **Rio Azul**

FAMILY GARDENS

Throughout the year, 180 families continued to grow their family gardens in the communities of Acul, Rio Azul, Xonca, and Villa Hortensia II (family gardens have not yet been established in the new Cotzal communities). Some of the families encountered difficulties such as pest attacks, flooding of crops in



Agriculture is the main source of food and income for many in these remote, mountainous communities.

the rainy season, and a need for irrigation in summer. The facilitators were able to provide support and troubleshoot problems by staying in close contact with trained volunteers in the communities who cascade agricultural training and knowledge to other families. This support included applying organic pesticides and digging furrows to improve drainage and irrigation.

In April, families received seeds or pilóns of beets, carrots, cilantro, and chard, and in August they received broccoli, cauliflower, onions, and chili peppers. **The availability of fresh vegetables grown at home has been critical during the COVID-19 lockdown, and many families were able to share their produce with neighbours who had no food.**

VEGGIE SEEDLINGS

From the Spanish “pilón” and named after their conical shape, FH Guatemala is providing plugs of vegetable seedlings for kitchen gardens. These seedlings are not grown using traditional seed germination, but from the root system with roots wrapped around a clump of nutritious soil that comes with the seedling. They are stronger, disease-free seedlings.

In August, culinary lessons took place to help families learn ways to incorporate new vegetables into their diets, particularly benefitting children under two years of age with fresh, nutritious food. During the training, they were taught six new recipes: omelet with chard, carrot cake, cabbage stew, beet salad, and broccoli salad, all made with vegetables harvested from their own gardens. Making these nutritious foods culturally appealing and acceptable is critical for the sustainability of improved diets in the communities. The agriculture facilitator trained five groups of 10 participants, complying with the sanitary measures established to prevent the spread of the pandemic (50 participants total).



This thriving family garden will raise children's nutrition, increase neighbourhood food security, and boost the family's income.

FAMILY GARDENS IN NEBAJ

Community Name	Garden Promoters	Families with Gardens	# Seeds / Pilon (April)	# Seeds / Pilon (August)
Acul	6	60	1,800	1,800
Rio Azul	3	40	1,200	1,200
Xonca	3	40	1,200	1,200
Villa Hortensia II	4	40	1,200	1,200
TOTAL	16	180	5,400	5,400

SAVINGS AND LOANS GROUPS IN NEBAJ

Community Name	Name of Group	# of Members	Accumulated Savings (GTQ)	Accumulated Savings (CAD)
Xonca	Mujeres Ixiles	14	13,135	\$2,192.82
Rio Azul	Las Rosas	9	16,850	\$2,813.02
Rio Azul	Las Margaritas Unidas	9	15,357	\$2,563.77
Rio Azul	Mujeres de Agua Azul	10	7,876	\$1,314.86
Villa Hortensia II	Las Palmeras	7	212,960	\$3,666.11
Villa Hortensia II	Azucenas	11	31,060	\$5,185.31
Acul	Mujeres Intelectuales	10	5,580	\$931.55
Acul	Mujeres Tejedoras	10	12,125	\$2,024.21
Acul	Mujeres de da Libertad	9	10,900	\$1,819.70
Acul	Mujeres Activas	13	12,770	\$2,131.89
TOTALS		102	147,613	\$24,643.24



Savings group leaders prepare for one of their regular group meetings. The ability to continue saving even during a pandemic is a sign of resilience.



LEADERSHIP

COMMUNITY LEADERS

FH facilitators make phone calls once a week to community and church leaders to pray for them and to ask how the communities are doing. **The team has seen many blessings this year, despite the difficult ways the pandemic is affecting the lives of people both economically and physically.** In spite of much uncertainty, the FH Guatemala team reports that community leaders have increased unity, improved organization, and deepened their empathy as they face the pandemic. These are encouraging signs of the communities' growing sustainability—that local leadership will continue caring for and strengthening their communities after graduating from FH partnership.

Community leaders have played an important role in spreading information and motivating families to comply with regulations such as the correct use of the masks, handwashing technique, and physical distancing. In the community of Tixelap, the president of their Community Development Council, Juan Bernal Us, organized the community to provide support for 30 families in their community with limited resources.

“I always wanted someone to help me strengthen my knowledge and responsibility... As community leaders, we are sometimes unaware of the role that we play. We have a responsibility to serve people in the community.”

— Juan Moises, **Villa Hortensia II**

CHURCH LEADERS

Coronavirus has provided church leaders an opportunity to put into practice the lessons they learned during their training, such as: acts of service and love, integral mission of the church, and the church in action. As a result, churches have reached out to help those most in need. They have organized to collect food and distribute to the neediest families. They have also encouraged families to worship and pray at home. “The fact that the [churches] are closed does not mean that we cannot worship God,” says one of the pastors.



“The families of the communities have a lot to give and potential to develop, what limits them is the fear of expressing themselves because they are not used to it, but they only need help and follow-up to enrich and nurture their skills.”

— Antonio Toma, **Multisectoral FH Facilitator**

Isabela Alonzo is a 25-year-old mother of three living in Santa Avelina, Cotzal. Her youngest child was born with a disability. For this single income family living in a one-room house and working hard to make ends meet, raising a child with a disability is a huge challenge. Isabela’s husband, Gaspar, is a day-labourer and bricklayer’s assistant while Isabela stays home full-time with the kids.

When FH began a partnership with their community less than two years ago, Isabela was not interested in getting involved. She believed the meetings were a waste of time as attendees did not receive any handouts. In spite of her disinterest, FH field staff cheerfully visited her at home, anyway. They explained how many of the meetings were safe spaces to gather with other women and learn about health and nutrition that could help her better care for her family. Eventually, she decided to give it a try.

And she loved it. “It has been a great blessing to be part of the FH program and share with my neighbours,” Isabela explains. “Thanks to the ideas and training I have learned a lot about taking care of my family and especially watching over the health of my children.” Previously, Isabela did not understand why her youngest son didn’t eat and had no appetite. Through FH health training, she now understands how to stimulate and nurture her son into improved health. To help get her son up to weight, FH even helped her with solutions and nutritional supplements to get him eating again.

Isabela has now been a member of a Cascade health group for one year. Before COVID-19 brought meeting restrictions to her community, she actively participated in all the trainings. Now she receives regular visits from the Leader Mother of her group who helps her with hygiene and nutrition. Sometimes Isabela gets to accompany her on visits to other mothers and share from her personal experience nurturing her



Isabela and her children outside their one-bedroom home.

own family, always taking care to observe COVID-19 protocols and prevent the spread of the virus. During this turbulent year, Isabela is especially grateful for the food bags FH provided to their community to help them weather this time of shortage.

While receiving this practical support, Isabela comments that she now understands ideas and knowledge are even more important than receiving help or food. She’s seen that when she puts into practice new health techniques, she has the power to change her family for the better. She feels that the knowledge she’s gained makes her a person with greater value who is capable of achieving what she sets out to do and recognizes there is still so much to learn.

Today, Isabela’s family is filled with hope and excited about the future God has for them. They believe he has given them great potential and that they are able to contribute to the development of not only their own family, but also their community. She concludes, “I also ask that you pray for my family, especially for my youngest son Juan Castro García who is in the process of getting his little body properly formed due to his physical disability from birth.”

Thank You

FH Canada, FH Guatemala, and the families of the Nebaj and Cotzal communities thank you for your vital support of their journey out of poverty. Your generosity this year has been especially powerful in the face of COVID-19 challenges. Together, we are building resilient communities whose children look toward a hopeful future.