

Millions of Central American Farmers Suffer Severe Drought



Tegucigalpa, August 1 (teleSUR-RHC)-- After months without rain, Central American agriculture is suffering and farmers are struggling against crop loss and hunger in the face of a severe drought battering the region.

Central American farmers produce basic staple grains of corn, bean, and rice through the rainy season, sowing their seeds when the first rains come in May. But this year many farmers have lost their crops, putting seeds in the ground only to have them dry up in drought.

Earlier this year, experts predicted major crop damage due to El Nino, a climate change phenomenon originating in the Pacific Ocean that can disrupt regular weather patterns and trigger floods, droughts, and other extreme conditions around the world.

Meanwhile, in neighboring Guatemala more than 300,000 families are feeling the impacts of the dry spell, and producers in El Salvador aren't faring any better, with more than 80 percent of farmer reporting they have suffered crop losses as the country sits on the brink of a national emergency. Costa Rica has already lost millions of dollars in agricultural production, and the Caribbean is facing the worst drought seen in years.

Lindolfo Campos, mayor of the Honduran town of Texiguat, said that between 80 and 100 people come on a daily basis to collect the solidarity package of basic food stuffs being distributed by the Texiguat municipality to help mitigate the devastating consequences of the drought.

Texiguat, where 80 percent of the 12,000 residents live in extreme poverty, is located in the geographical corridor of Central America stretching from Panama to Guatemala that is hardest hit by the drought. The dry corridor is home to some 1 million subsistence Central American farmers.

Though all are struggling, farmers in Central America using agroecological crop methods have built up some resistance to the devastating impacts of drought by diversifying crops, harvesting rainwater, and promoting good soil conditions by leaving slash-and-burn practices behind in favor of techniques that regenerate the soil without exacerbating drought.

Droughts threaten the already fragile food security in Central America, where 25 percent of the population suffer malnutrition, according to U.N. statistics. The U.N. has also acknowledged that small scale sustainable agriculture is critical to feed the planet in the face of climate change.

But it takes time to implement these techniques and reap the benefits. While the drought batters Central America, it also underlines the importance of more farmers adopting agro-ecological practices to build resilience and cultivate their own economic and food security.

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