

Agriculture in Los Toros



The Basics: Climate and Soil

- Average Temperature: 70
- Annual Rainfall: 27 inches (Driest region in the DR, and actually less rainfall than Milwaukee!)
- Soil: Sandy Clay Loam, which is pretty good for growing if it has low salinity (salt) content and good irrigation.
- Irrigation: Today there are some nice irrigation channels running from the hills to the north and south, which have allowed farmers to produce a lot more than they used to.

Plantains



Crops

- Staples: Plantains/Bananas (a number of varieties), Yucca (Cassava), Squash, Beans, Sugarcane
- Cash Crops: Tobacco, Corn, Tomatoes, Eggplant
- Fruit: Almost any fruit you can imagine, especially mangoes, is growing everywhere. In fields, yards, and along the streets and paths.

Manual Labor



Working

- Most of the work is done by hand, with basic tools like hoes, shovels, pick axes, and horse-drawn plows.
- For big jobs like harvesting or weeding entire fields in one day, the farmers hire family, friends, and oftentimes Haitian laborers to spend the day in the sun.
- It is hot and humid, but most of the laborers are cheerful while they work. Haitians often sing centuries old work songs!

Pay

- Farmers earn very little for their efforts; a typical crop of tomatoes will earn a farmer as little as 30,000 pesos, or around 900 dollars, after 3 months of work.
- The typical laborer gets paid 6 to 8 dollars for a hard day's work. Remember, this is an improvement for the Haitian people who have left their country looking for work!

Challenges

- **Environment:** Explosive weed growth, ever present pests and crop diseases, and flooding during hurricane season, can all destroy crops.
- **Health:** Many farmers routinely use dangerous chemicals without safety equipment. Hard physical labor, especially harvesting, can harm their bodies, especially backs.

Challenges Continued...

- **Capital:** Affording seeds, fertilizer, pesticides, equipment, shipping/transportation, and labor can be hard, because farmers earn very little money.
- **Market:** Too many farmers oftentimes produce the same crop simultaneously, which means they all will receive less than they would have otherwise. The buyers in Azua and elsewhere don't need to bargain if they have a long line of farmers selling them the same crop!

Preparing Tobacco



Tobacco and Contract Farming

- In response to the above challenges, many farmers turn to producing cash crops like tobacco, or signing contracts with large agricultural companies.

Tobacco

Although it is an attractive crop because of the high price farmers can receive there are many reasons why it can be harmful:

- **Environmental:** Tobacco takes a lot from the soil, and it doesn't give back. After growing a crop, a farmer must spend a lot of money fertilizing the soil before growing a new crop.
- **Economic:** Tobacco is extremely labor intensive! It is expensive to hire all of the laborers, and if a farmer cannot afford to care for the crop, it may get a leaf disease, which reduces the price it will get on the market!
- **Health:** Farming tobacco can be toxic. Many of the same chemicals that make smoking it dangerous, make touching and cultivating the crop dangerous!

Surveying the Yucca



Contract Farming

- Farmers sign contracts dictating a price at which they will sell their entire crop, usually tomatoes, to the company, and in return receive loan money for seeds, fertilizer, pesticides, equipment, labor, and transport.
- While this helps the farmers overcome their lack of capital, it can hurt them in the long run.
- **Price:** The contract price may be lower than the market price when a farmer has to sell the crop to the company. The company is usually better at predicting these things than the farmers...
- **Delivery:** The company sends trucks to pick up the crops, and weighs them at their facility. This gives it the ability to take less tomatoes if its contract farmers have overproduced, even though the contract requires them to buy the entire crop. The company can send an insufficient number of trucks, causing the farmers to overload the vehicles. Many tomatoes will spill out of the trucks, and the water is squeezed out of the bottom layers, leading to a lower weight, and less money, for the farmers.

Contract Farming Continued...

- **Quality:** At the factory, the company decides which tomatoes meet their quality standards. The company will return to the farmers and say “We had to get rid of (this many) bad tomatoes” and the farmer is unable to know just how “bad” they were!
- In the end, the farmer may come out ahead, but some end up making little to no money, which leaves him unable to do anything other than... SIGN A NEW CONTRACT!

Farmer's Co-operative

- In an attempt to address these issues, LTF has started a Co-op which offers a potential local source of capital which does not come with the same risks of exploitation.