



# FAO in Action

## Back on track

### FAO puts farmers back on their feet

When the rains of El Niño hit in the Manabi Province of Ecuador in 1998, farmer Ethiel Brieones was devastated. All of the fruits of his labour washed away with the rain, as well as any opportunity to feed his family and earn cash from his crops. He had five children and a wife to support.

"It rained every day for ten months. Water and mud came from the mountains. It almost reached the windows of our house. All my trees died," said 60-year-old Mr Brieones.

All the water canals in the area were filled with infertile mud which also covered hectare after hectare of land. The rain was followed by months of drought, and Mr Brieones' fields - along with fields in the rest of the province - became grey, hard and barren. Many of the farmers lost everything they had, and the following year they produced almost nothing.

But today things are very different. With the help of FAO's Special Programme for Food Security (SPFS), Mr Brieones is back on his feet. As he looked over his two hectare farm, covered with bananas, maize, papayas, peppers and beans, he smiled, proudly proclaiming: "Now I produce again."

"These farmers have most of the necessary skills and know-how already," said Napoleon Cedeño, one of the local FAO experts. "We just show them how they can best take advantage of what they've already got."

The SPFS project was funded by FAO and the government of Ecuador. The project aimed to improve food security and placed emphasis on training in sustainable water use, improving soil and post-harvest techniques and organizing local farmers' groups.

The farmers targeted by the programme changed crops and cultivation methods, something that has dramatically improved their harvests. Ethiel Brieones was among several farmers who built pilot irrigation systems on areas of his farm. FAO provided pumps and tubing, plus training, enabling him to produce more and better crops.

When we visited Mr Brieones, his first harvest of green peppers was almost ready from the irrigated field. "It looks as if it is going to be a good harvest," he said and points to the plants weighed down by the bulging peppers. He wanted to sell the peppers so that he would be able to irrigate an even bigger plot.



# Facts and figures

## About FAO's Special Programme for Food Security

FAO's Special Programme for Food Security (SPFS) aims at supporting mainly low-income food deficit countries (LIFDCs) in their effort to:

- Improve their national food security through rapid increases in productivity and food production in an economically and environmentally sustainable basis;
- Reduce year-to-year variability in agricultural production;
- Improve people's access to food.

Moreover SPFS is a multidisciplinary programme with a strong emphasis on meeting people's needs directly by raising farmers's income, generating rural employment, increasing social equity and promoting gender sensitivity.

The SPFS programme was launched in 1994. Today 68 developing countries are covered by SPFS activities

SPFS allows countries to implement their national strategies to improve the livelihoods of rural people by expanding production on small farms through low-cost small-scale water harvesting, irrigation technologies and improved farming techniques to increase crop productivity and ensure diversification in small animal production, such as poultry, sheep, goats, pigs, including artisanal fishing and aquaculture.

The SPFS is founded on the concepts of national ownership with the participation of farmers and other stakeholders at all stages of Programme's implementation, participatory and multidisciplinary approach, poverty alleviation, priority given to small farmers, economic and environmental sustainability and social and gender equity.

The SPFS is expected to contribute substantially to the implementation of the World Food Summit Plan of Action in all the LIFDCs at the individual, household and national levels.

The Programme also uses the lessons from field experience to encourage policy adjustments to create a more favourable environment for enhancing agricultural investment.

South-South Cooperation is an important scheme within the framework of the SPFS. It is about allowing countries to benefit from the experience and expertise of other more advanced developing countries. This is done by providing experts for two or three years to work in the implementation of the SPFS in the recipient countries. The experts work directly with farmers in rural communities involved in the SPFS.

By April 2002, 26 South-South Cooperation agreements had been signed between countries.

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Or look at the web site of FAO's Special Programme for Food Security:  
<http://www.fao.org/spfs/index.asp>