



FAO in Action

Saving time and preserving the harvest FAO helps farmers with simple but effective technologies

Fifteen indigenous women have been waiting patiently for FAO engineer Yeric Peric to arrive at the small settlement of Calala in the Bolivian Altiplano. Their faces light up when he appears, carrying a little red grain mill and a tall metal silo. The head of the women's group, Norma Llanos de Ruiz, is ready to welcome him with a cup of the locally fermented maize drink chicha.

Mr Peric, the local manager of an FAO post-harvest project and two TeleFood projects in the department of Potosi, needs the refreshment. It has been a tough three-hour drive across swollen streams and rough countryside to bring his treasures to this remote village, and it is already his second visit of the day to local women's groups. All in all, 600 silos and 20 grain mills have been constructed and distributed throughout the department of Potosi in eight months.

Production of the silos and the grain mills is supported by the FAO's TeleFood campaign, aimed at raising awareness and funds to help end world hunger. TeleFood pays for the materials, but the participants have to scrape together funds for the labour -- US\$9 for the silo and US\$125 for the grain mill -- a lot of money in a village with a minimal cash economy.

The women in Calala have been saving for a long time to buy these simple but crucial tools. "We are very happy. With the silo we can save our harvest, and the mill will help us save time," says Ms Llanos de Ruiz, who is 22 years old and one of the few in the group who speaks Spanish - the others speak Quechua.

Without the mill, each woman would spend between two and three hours every day grinding wheat and maize manually between two stones to

get enough flour to make food for their families. When Mr Peric demonstrates the mill and teaches the women how to handle and maintain it, the benefit of the mill becomes evidently clear. "From now on it will take 15 minutes to grind enough grain for all of us," says Ms Llanos de Ruiz.

Each woman has brought around 20 kilos of maize. Before it is put into the new silo, it is weighed and registered in the group's diary. Traditionally, the grain is stored in a loft above the fireplace in the kitchen, where the smoke helps to keep it free from pests. But this system is not very effective - every year a large part of the harvest is lost to rats and other pests. The silo preserves an additional 20 to 40 percent of the cereal harvest. With 600 new silos in Potosi, at least 36,480 additional kilos of wheat can be preserved each year. Put another way: 500 to 600 more families will achieve food security. In addition, the grain will be cleaner and healthier.

In Calala there is only the one group silo, which can hold about 250 kilos, but the women dream of getting individual silos. "It is amazing to see the immense impact that simple technologies can have on the daily life of the farmers," says Mr Peric. "We can already see development in the communities where a lot of the families have individual silos for their grain. There the children tend to get sick less, and nutrition is improving."

It is time for Mr Peric to leave, but first, he is asked to baptise the new mill and the silo. Ms Llanos de Ruiz hands him a large jar of chicha. He takes a big sip and then pours some of it over the mill and the silos. The women bless him and his car and he prepares to leave - heading for the next village.



Facts and figures

About FAO's TeleFood campaign

TeleFood is FAO's annual campaign of broadcasts, concerts and other events aimed at raising awareness about world hunger and mobilizing resources for hunger-fighting projects.

The TeleFood campaign centres around the observance of World Food Day, marking the founding of FAO on 16 October 1945.

Since its inception in 1997, the TeleFood initiative has collected more than US\$9 million. It has financed over 1000 TeleFood projects in more than 100 countries around the world.

Donations received for TeleFood go directly, without administrative costs, to poor farmers to help them achieve the capacity to produce more and better food for their families.

TeleFood gives poor farmers the tools to grow crops, raise livestock and fish, process food to sell it at a better price. The money goes to seeds and fertilizers, to irrigation pumps, silos or fish smoking ovens.

The maximum cost of a project is US\$10 000. Although small in scale and cost, they make a significant impact. Students in a primary school in Uganda can have lunch thanks to donations that helped them create a vegetable and fruit garden. Unemployed women and out-of-school youths in Cotabato, Philippines, have learned to increase crop yields with organic farming techniques.

Just US\$40 buys a bee colony that produces 15 kilos of honey per year. With US\$125 a farmer can purchase a pump to irrigate 2,500 square metres of vegetable crops. Around US\$300 buys 60 farmers enough seeds to plant a 20 hectare field of vegetables.

Nearly half of the TeleFood funds collected go to projects involving women and young people.

Celebrities, school children, farmers, communities and individuals from all over the world support TeleFood, contributing their voices and their time to the fight against hunger.

It is easy for all to support TeleFood. One can promote activities, sponsor a TeleFood awareness-raising event or donate money to the small-scale projects.

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You can also look at the web site of the TeleFood campaign: <http://www.telefood.com>