Bringing Leadership Training to Milk Collection Centers in Honduras

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Abstract

Introduction
Although the dairy industry in Honduras represents a permanent source of income and well being for approximately 36% of the population in rural areas (INE, 2002), it has traditionally been a poorly organized industry. A recent study conducted in 20 Centros de Recolección y Enfriamiento de Leche (CREL) in the north coast of Honduras revealed the urgent need to identify, prepare and bring leadership to the CRELs. Most small dairy farmers lack formal education. While milk production has been a fairly profitable business in Honduras, price seasonality kept small farmers from changing their rudimentary dual-purpose systems to more efficient dual-purpose systems.

Method
Exploratory data collected from a recent study with CRELs was utilized with the objective of: 1. Raising awareness among members and leaders of the importance of leadership training. 2. Designing workshops for CREL members on leadership training, and 3. Improving organizational development and knowledge skills using leadership training.

Points of Information

- In the year 2000, 13 CREL were created with the objective of serving as marketing units for small farmers. CRELs are farmer owned centers and each center has between 15-30 members. Farmers are able to sell all the milk produced year round at premium prices. The premium represents an additional $0.06 - $0.12 per liter.

- As the initial 13 CRELs started working, neighboring farmers realized the marketing opportunities CRELs offered. At this time, 49 additional centers are in the process of starting operations. CRELs are the only channel for small farmers to sell milk to processing plants. Free trade agreements have not come into place in Honduras yet.

- Farmer associations and governmental extension programs have lacked the leadership necessary to guide farmers towards competitive schemes. Private extension programs have been short-term technical interventions seeking to improve milk production from a technical standpoint of view. Recent research shows CREL members are highly motivated and are seeking to improve their production schemes as well as the centers.

Lessons learned
Leadership training is necessary to strengthen CRELs. These centers represent the primary source of income for families in rural settings. Their success or failure will deeply affect rural economies. Leading CRELs requires vision, expertise, commitment and true leadership as the times that lie ahead are expected to be difficult.

Educational Importance
The need of identifying and training farmers that develop managerial and leadership skills is a priority at this time. Farmers are highly motivated to change. There is skepticism as to how CRELs will develop in the near future due to the lack of expertise and knowledge among its members. It is necessary to bring group leadership, teamwork and knowledge to CREL members to ensure they develop to their fullest potential.