

Heifer FOH January Statement Sticker



Heifer helped the micro-business build a more eco-friendly oven, which Rosita Vasquez's husband, Coronado Melgar, operates. Here Coronado and Rosita remove a batch of cookies from the oven. Once cooled, the cookies will be packaged and sold.



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COMMUNICATIONS



Dear Friend,

For members of the Lenca indigenous community, farming is a way of life dating back generations. But for most, it's been subsistence farming: just enough to keep a family going, but rarely enough for them to get ahead in Lempira, this poor region of Honduras.

That's beginning to change, thanks to some very hard work and your generous monthly gifts to Heifer. Today, farmers like Rosalina "Rosita" Vasquez are converting time-honored traditions into thriving enterprises. Heifer is expanding their knowledge of sanitation, nutrition, packaging and marketing. Project participants are reinvesting profits to grow their businesses, while also supporting the elderly and infirm in their community who are unable to participate directly.

Once a struggling single mother, Rosita now leads a group of 16 women and 11 men in their burgeoning enterprise, *Minas de Colосуca*. They make cookies, bread and empanadas filled with *cuajada*, a local cheese. Business is good, even if the path to get here was not always smooth.

The oldest of eight, Rosita grew up extremely poor, working in the corn and sugarcane fields alongside her parents, five sisters and two brothers. Occasionally, her father would make the arduous five-day trek to El Salvador on horseback to sell bread, returning with food and medicine.

Life was already a struggle when Hurricane Fifi–Orlene struck, destroying everything in its path. *"It ripped trees from their roots and dropped them on cattle,"* Rosita said. As many as 10,000 people died, and 350,000 were left homeless. But the community came together, as the Lenca do, to help each other through the crisis. *"We learned to love others, to treat people kindly and to share what you have,"* Rosita said.

At 14, Rosita quit school, giving up her dream of becoming a teacher, to help out on the farm full time. She married and had two children: Arnold Antonio and Sarahy. Then her husband left, and Rosita was on her own.

It was around this point in her life, with two little children and no partner, that a new resolve began to grow. Somehow, through sheer will, she decided to make a better life for herself and her family. She built a two-room home using materials from her father and the skills he taught her. Everyone participated — even her children carried mud and bricks — though Rosita did most of the work. *"I dug the foundation,"* she said. *"I climbed up and put on the roof. I did a man's work."*

After her father died, Rosita and her sister took over his farm, planting corn and sugarcane as he had and following the lessons he passed down. She also remarried; her new husband, Jose Coronado Melgar, became a father to her two children and the two they had together: Jessy and Fabio. Like Rosita's parents, she and Coronado teach them the Lenca traditions. *"What I know, they know,"* she said. *"I taught them to respect their elders, to treat people kindly and to share with others."*

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Over the years, Rosita and Coronado took advantage of opportunities to improve on the old practices, taking advantage of training and financing when it was offered. Then, Heifer organized a meeting with 17 families, including Rosita's. *"We were told there would be an opportunity to establish a program for food security and that we would be given support with chickens, goats, cows, basic grains and silage, and also with materials to fix our homes,"* she said.

This was *Lenca I*, Heifer's first project in the area. Rosita's daughter got a cow, while Rosita received specialized training in increasing the productivity and profitability of livestock and the benefits of community groups. Program participants organized a group to provide milk and eggs to malnourished children. Charity remains a critical component of the group's efforts, and one that excites Rosita: *"We hope that this business can have a positive impact on the community,"* she said. These families formed one of many community groups in the area.

Lenca I evolved into *Lenca II*, which helps groups like Rosita's develop and manage businesses. Rosita's group started small, baking bread for their families and selling cookies door-to-door. They grew most of the ingredients themselves; what they didn't grow, they purchased locally. Then Heifer helped them expand. *"We began to make bread, we made tamalitos, we made pasteles,"* Rosita said. Soon, they turned a profit, which they used to create a fund that offers low-interest loans, as well as economic aid for local families in need.

"We've worked hand-in-hand with Heifer on many things — training in how to obtain our sanitary registry, basic accounting, labeling and packaging," Rosita said. Heifer also helped the group build a safer, more eco-friendly oven, which Coronado maintains and operates.

The group recently added a new product to their lineup: nutritional mineral blocks for cattle. *"Before, some cattle died, and others were very skinny,"* Rosita said. But the mineral blocks improved the cows' health, *"Now we have fewer deaths, better births and almost no sicknesses."* The blocks are also the most profitable product *Minas de Colosuca* sells. *"You can make a ton of bread, but the profits are small,"* Rosita said. *"That is why we want to diversify — make many kinds of things."*

Promising ventures like this are taking hold all over the world, thanks to your monthly support! As *Lenca II* continues, Rosita's group will diversify, expand and find new ways to create income and give their children a better future. Just as these families look to Heifer to help them build new skills and become self-reliant, we depend on you to provide the resources to help us do this important work.

Thank you, as always, for your generosity and compassion.

Sincerely,



Pierre Ferrari
President and CEO