



Promoting Sustainable Rice Production in the Dominican Republic



The Dominican Sustainable Tourism Alliance (DSTA) supported project, through Counterpart International, is bringing together a coalition of rice farmers, water user groups, agri-businesses, agricultural finance institutions, and government agencies. Working together, the partnership is mapping-out and implementing an overarching strategy to reduce the negative environmental impacts of rice cultivation and improve the economic competitiveness of rice farming in the region.

Since the 1980s, intensively irrigated rice farms have become the economic backbone of the northwestern Dominican Republic. This intensification of farmland cultivation, however, has had a high environmental price tag. The region's streams, rivers, and lakes receive excessive amounts of fertilizers, pesticides, and sediments from agricultural runoff or leaching into the groundwater tables - a consequence of indiscriminate use of agricultural chemicals. Subsequently, these water systems empty into the coastal waters of the Montecristi National Park, threatening the survival of the Park's renowned mangrove forests and coral reefs.

Recognizing that complex social and economic factors have fueled the continued expansion of rice cultivation in the region, the DSTA-supported project established the stakeholder coalition to address the following objectives:

1. Raising awareness on the environmental impact of rice production.
2. Identifying current rice production practices and assessing the environmental soundness of these practices.
3. Training local communities in sustainable rice farming practices.

Project staff worked with 65 rice farmers in three pilot areas, training them in a range of soil and water conservation techniques and integrated pest and nutrient management practices. Trainings conducted by Rainforest Alliance staff helped compile a list of conservation practices and develop strategies to orient stakeholders in pilot areas. In addition, farmers and project personnel engaged in various hands-on activities such as:

- Scouting fields for pests and diseases.
- Developing and implementing irrigation schedules.
- Planting grass cover crops along the borders of field drains.

As a result of these activities, collaborating farmers reduced the quantity and frequency of chemicals and irrigation water being applied over the rice production season. Program farmers also increased the average economic yields of rice by over 15%.

The project is in the process of strengthening the coalition by expanding the role of the water user groups in Villa Vásquez and Bajo Yaque del Norte irrigation districts and expanding training to government agricultural technicians in conservation practices promoted by the project. The project's goal is to reach 2,000 farmers by project end date to create the foundation for a sustainable rice production system that is both environmentally sound and economically profitable.