

# UNIVERSITIES, COMMUNITIES AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS WORKING TOGETHER TO IMPROVE PEST MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES IN CENTRAL AMERICA

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In this Project, which began in 2006, Universities are collaborating with rural communities and other relevant stakeholders to increase food security through better pest management practices. The four participating Universities are the Universidad de Costa Rica, Universidad Nacional Agraria (Nicaragua), the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras, and University of Manitoba (Canada). Funding for regional interdisciplinary collaboration and capacity building is provided by the Canadian International Development Agency under its University Partnerships in Cooperation and Development Program.

The project entitled *Community-based Pest Management in Central American Agriculture* involves three main components. The community development component works directly with farm families in rural communities to understand how and why they farm the way they do with particular focus on their pest management practices. The technical component implements demonstration plots and facilitates outreach activities that are meant to raise awareness of safer pesticide storage, handling and use practices, as well as provide alternatives to pesticide use. It also builds on technical capacities at the three Central America Universities. The policy component includes the development of indicators to help understand current practices and monitor change over time. This approach is not only meant to raise awareness and change behaviors at a farming-community level, it is also meant to influence local and national policies related to pesticide use.

Particularly relevant to education and information management in crop protection is the outreach work done by university students in farming communities. Following an initial training course on participatory methods, students live with farm families for up to a month documenting common pesticide handling, storage and usage practices and other agricultural practices. To date, 51 students have participated in these activities. Not only has this been an incredibly educational process for the students, the farm families and the communities involved, their data was fundamental in, and continues to inform, the planning of technical outreach work and policy development. For example, based on students' findings, project team members created and implemented over 15 educational workshops on integrated pest management and safety practices and 11 demonstration plots. Further, students' findings provided the base for identifying which type of indicators are required at local, national and regional levels. Benefiting from regional collaboration, all three Central American project teams developed and implemented surveys to collect the information required to developing and refining the indicators.

Detailed information on the project is available at the following Internet-site: [www.umanitoba.ca/afs/centralamerica\\_cbpm](http://www.umanitoba.ca/afs/centralamerica_cbpm). The website is bilingual (English – Spanish). The Internet-site is frequently visited as there were 84,200 of hits since its inception (in April 27th, 2009) by over 64,500 visitors.