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FAMILY-TO-FAMILY

NEWSLETTER

CULTIVATING MAXAN | IMPROVING SANITATION | FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Cultivating Maxan

Tamales have been an essential part of Mayan culture for thousands of years. While more elaborate tamales are enjoyed at Christmas, New Year's, and other celebrations, simple corn tamales are typically prepared and cooked for meals once or twice each week. Wrapped in maxan leaf (pictured on the right) or banana leaf, a corn dough forms the foundation of the tamale, much like maize has been a sacred building block of life for the Mayan people.

Given that the maxan plant was once on an endangered species list and was removed in 2011 (*Prensa Libre*, 12/7/2011), sustainable farming practices are critical. Family-to-Family is grateful to families we have served for teaching us how to farm maxan, thus allowing us to share this knowledge with others. Now, we cultivate maxan at our nursery in Xe'ul so that we can help folks begin or expand their own maxan farms. In addition to plant starts and education, FTF also provides tools for working the crop such as machetes and rakes. Families have recently requested a very small specialized knife for pruning maxan plants and removing yellow leaves.

Maxan is harvested four times each year. The leaves are cut from the plant and rolled into bundles of 20. In the market, the price of one bundle is five quetzales which is equivalent to about US\$ 0.65. If growers sell maxan to a vendor collecting the leaves to take to market, they receive much less, about US\$ 0.20 per bundle. During harvest, maxan farmers earn about 500 quetzales each month, which is approximately US\$ 65.

Maxan leaves are used for more than tamales. They provide a natural, environmentally-friendly way to wrap and keep food, to package cheese and meat, and to line tortilla baskets. The leaf has long been used in packing food for travel, and tamales have been a fundamental source of portable sustenance throughout millennia.



The tamale pictured above is wrapped twice, by maxan leaf on the outside and banana leaf inside. It is a tamal colorado, or red tamale, with a chicken filling.

Improving Sanitation

Guatemala, in area, is about 60% the size of Washington State. With 18 million people, Guatemala's population density is roughly four times that of Washington State. In the rural communities we serve, families often live close together and lack basic services such as running water and a sanitary latrine.

According to a 2021 joint report by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 68% of the Guatemalan population uses at least basic sanitation services not shared with other households, while 11% share limited sanitation services with other households. In both cases, the data include composting toilets, toilets to sewer systems, septic tanks, and pit latrines. Family-to-Family works to increase the number of families with basic sanitation services by providing pit latrines for families participating in the program. The photo on the left shows the construction of a latrine for an FTF family.



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According to the same report, *Progress on household drinking water, sanitation and hygiene 2000-2020: five years into the SDGs* (Sustainable Development Goals), 77% of Guatemalans live in households with a handwashing facility with soap and water. This figure counts sinks with taps, buckets, jugs, or basins designated for handwashing. Family-to-Family works to provide a sink with running water for each family participating in the program. The sink is installed outdoors with water piped from a shared spring. Wastewater is routed away from the home. We are hoping to soon begin a septic trench project that would further improve personal and environmental health.



Sustaining Family-to-Family

We could not do the work we do without our Family-to-Family Board. FTF Board members include program founders Jerry and Clara Monks, previous directors Miriam and Roger Devaney, as well as Maureen Albi, Angeles Aller, Olive Villelli-LaPlante, Fr. Pat Kerst, Greg Miller, and Brenda Lacey-Scholze. Each member of the Board brings unique experience, perspective, skill, and expertise to the program. On behalf of everyone involved in Family-to-Family, we thank the Board for their generous volunteer service.

In addition to communicating regularly by email, the board meets quarterly to review financials, discuss projects, and make decisions regarding the program, its finances, and its services. FTF has an endowment that we monitor and draw from as needed. We are extremely grateful to those who have invested in the future of FTF, allowing us this financial security. Should you be interested in making a gift to this fund, please reach out to us and we will coordinate with our Financial Advisor Scott Brockway.

Scott reminds us that supporters can donate cash directly to our investment fund or donate highly appreciated securities which, without capital gains taxes, may increase the value of the gift by 20%. Market downturns are, generally, a good time to invest; we hope you consider Family-to-Family as you look to fulfill your charitable giving goals.

About Family-to-Family: Family-to-Family was founded in 1985 as an economic development program in the Guatemalan Highlands. Its primary mission is to provide income-producing skills training and resources to families and communities working to rise from poverty and become self-sufficient. For further information about the Family-to-Family program or to view previous newsletters, please visit our website www.familytofamilyguatemala.com. You may also contact us by email at ftfguatemala@gmail.com or by phone at (509) 593-8204. This newsletter was written by local director Julianne Connell Sachs.