



# Healthy Start

Rotary Newsletter - July 2021

## Exclusive Rotary Updates

Since the inaugural Healthy Start newsletter launched in April 2021, we have seen so much progress in the Healthy Start program in Guatemala!

Of course, we cannot speak about this progress without first thanking each of you, the Rotary Clubs who helped bring this project into fruition in the midst of a pandemic, where there could have been little hope for progress. Instead, we saw growth, prosperity, and generational change.

Agros is so grateful for the partnership with Rotary Clubs like yours, without which we would not be able to see such rapid progress in one of the poorest regions of the world in such a short period of time.

Please visit [Agros.org/HealthyStart](https://Agros.org/HealthyStart) to stay updated.

Sincerely,

Alberto Solano



Healthy Start participants receive critical health services like supplements to prevent malnutrition.

## Sowing Seeds of Progress

In May, Elsa (Pictured below) and Catarina (her mother-in-law) celebrated Sowing Day. On sowing day, Elsa and her family planted their field with corn and invited all those who helped their family to sow to celebrate with a chicken broth that their family prepared. With a large pot of broth on the fire in the center of the kitchen, everyone sat around on benches feasting and celebrating a successful day.

Like, Elsa and Catarina and their family, 100 families supported by Healthy Start planted corn and beans. Corn is the main staple crop and usually the only crop they grow in the Ixil region. In addition to corn, however, Healthy Start is supporting families to plant beans. As they sow and diversify, families are learning better agricultural practices to make their crops more productive.

Learning best agricultural practices requires a paradigm shift and Agros' agronomists guide them in this process. For instance, families would traditionally sow 5-6 corn grains per hole believing that if one seed does not germinate, others would. This might be true; however, best practice is one seed per hole. With adequate seed and soil preparation and fertilization to secure germination, enough spacing and without competing seed/plants, one seed per hole produces more yield than five plants close to each other.

Through field schools and demonstrative plots, Agros' agronomists are teaching best practices and showing results that support the farmers with new and improved farming methods. They even use examples of plots with 5 seeds per hole, plots with 3 seeds per hole, and finally plots with one seed per hole to show the difference. Better corn yields and a diversified diet means families are a step closer to being food secure!



Elsa planting her corn field on Sowing Day. Her mother-in-law, Catarina, and other family members supported the seed sowing.

In addition to corn and bean production, Healthy Start is introducing cash crops. Seven brave families decided to try, for the first time, growing snow peas to generate incomes to support their families. These crops are sold to a commercial partner who exports the production to the US and the UK.

Through Healthy Start we continue to provide vitamins and nutritional supplements to children with chronic malnutrition. We continue to train pregnant women and conduct regular home visits to teach about hygiene and preventative health practices.

The construction of a health clinic and an early childhood development center are also underway, and two new water systems for two Agros communities are nearly completed.

In May, we had the privilege of having representatives of **Club Rotario del Valle, Guatemala**, visit a few of the Agros villages to see all the progress in the Healthy Start communities of Asich and Ojo de Agua.

As we think about the families in Guatemala and the challenges they face, we want to express a heartfelt thank you for your partnership and for the opportunities you are providing and the hope you are enabling.

*THANK YOU!*



## Goals + Milestones

Unlike other aid programs, Healthy Start tackles hunger and extreme poverty at its roots, addressing, preventing, and overcoming hunger and childhood malnutrition. Here are some incredible progress updates!

**GOAL ONE: Prevent the incidence of chronic child malnutrition: by increasing the access to prenatal and early childhood care with emphasis on the newborn first 1000 days of life.**

- *Establish a network of Community Health Brigadistas (CHB):* The network of CHB has been established, trained, and equipped and are actively working with Agros staff and the Ministry of Health. To date we have twenty CHB actively working in their villages, twice more than expected.

Agros' relationship with the local authorities is outstanding and the program has captured the attention of the Central Government. Agros leadership and Del Valle Club have been invited to present the program to the Congressional Commission for Food Security and Nutrition in July. We anticipate more government entities will join the effort and help scale it in the area.

- *Strengthen the capacity to provide preventive health attention to pregnant women and children:* CHB and Agros staff have excelled in this goal. By the end of May, 24 of 32 projected trainings and workshops have taken place across four villages covering seven main training topics. In addition, the program has conducted monthly weight and size sessions to keep track of the progress of each participating child. To date the program has facilitated two immunization campaigns and children of age have been following their vaccination schedule.
- *Increase local access to first aid kits, basic medicines and nutritional supplements for prenatal care and early childhood development:* Four villages have received complete community first aid kits in addition to size and weight stations and an area for mothers, children and brigadistas meetings to take place. In one village, Agros is in the process of building an early childhood stimulation center. The center will allow mothers to learn how to better take care and help children in their sensitive learning stages and was designed with a kitchen area where clean and healthy cooking classes will be given to the mothers. Healthy meals will also be prepared here for the children.

**GOAL TWO: Reduce the incidence of chronic child malnutrition by improving the ability of the families to increase the quantity and the quality of their nutritional intake.**

- *Provision of essential nutritional packages for families with children suffering from severe and chronic malnutrition:* Due to the severe impacts of the health emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the two category 4 hurricanes that impacted the region, Agros was forced to double the amount of nutritional support provided to each participating family. The budgeted goal was to distribute 300 food and supplement packages, but after more than 90% of the harvest was destroyed by the hurricanes the hunger season came earlier this year to the villages. Normally, the hunger season lasts from April to July each year as the food supplies from the fall harvest are consumed. 2020 fall harvest was the one affected by the hurricanes and families were without food supply by February and March, forcing Agros to invest extra resources to mitigate the crisis.

To date Agros has distributed more than 600 food packages and 1696 nutritional supplement packages.

- *Increase the availability of nutritional food through backyard production:* 130 families participated in workshops and established backyard production gardens. The gardens plant eight different vegetables that significantly improved the quality of the families' diets and their nutritional intake. The gardens achieved their objective and families are excited to maintain them. In future interventions it will be necessary to include a nursery, so the villages learn how to produce their own seeds and plants to keep the backyard gardens throughout the year.

Agros is still in the process of establishing chicken coops to support the nutritional efforts by increasing the access to healthy proteins. During the visit we witnessed the early stages of construction of two chicken coops.

In the meantime, Agros is supporting children's nutrition by providing fresh goat milk 2-3 times a week to all participating children for a total of 2544 glasses of goat milk distributed, an unexpected activity in our plan.



Previously malnourished kids receive weekly rations of supplements.



## What is Healthy Start?

Healthy Start is a multi-year Program focused on overcoming child malnutrition in the Ixil Region of Guatemala. It started in October 2020 with the collaboration of 12 founding Rotary Clubs in three continents and has received a Global Grant.

## Key Stats

- 82% of Ixils live in extreme poverty.
- The villages Agros serves, working individuals currently have an income of less than 55 cents/day.
- Most families survive on just one harvest of basic grains per year.
- Since Oct. 2020, Healthy Start has reached 181 families and more than 242 children under the age of five, a total of 1,086 beneficiaries. These numbers continue to exceed our goals and estimates.

## How to Help

- Spread the word! Share this bulletin with friends, family, and other Rotarians.
- Visit [Agros.org/HealthStart](https://Agros.org/HealthStart) to keep informed.
- Invite us to speak at your next Rotary meeting! Contact Heather Ringoen at [heatherr@agros.org](mailto:heatherr@agros.org).
- Follow us on social media to stay up to date with some of the latest projects.
- Subscribe to the quarterly newsletter at [Agros.org/do/rotary-newsletter](https://Agros.org/do/rotary-newsletter).