

Contributions of rambutan production to poverty reduction of small scale farmers in La Masica, Honduras

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Abstract

Rambutan was first introduced to Central America by the United Fruit Company who established the Lancetilla Experiment Station in 1925 to evaluate the suitability of new oriental fruits for export to the USA. It adapted well to the climate of Honduras and was subsequently disseminated to neighbouring countries where it has become increasingly important. One of the poorest areas in Honduras is La Masica, a municipality of Atlántida, which used to be a major cocoa cultivation region. After Hurricane Mitch spread Frosty Pod Rot disease in 1998, many cocoa farmers had little choice other than to find alternative crops, which included rambutan. Fundación Hondureña de Investigación Agrícola – the Honduran Agricultural Research Foundation (FHIA) introduced new varieties of rambutan from Asia and Hawaii, which were subsequently promoted to small farmers to improve their livelihoods. A cooperative, AHPERAMBUTAN was established in 2000 to support and encourage smallholder growers and exporters. Frutas Exóticas was then set up in 2010 to support smallholder rambutan farmers, especially in the La Masica region. This paper reports on the development and future challenges of cultivating rambutan in Honduras, which include the potential benefits of improving quality linked to certification; better market analysis; the development of value-added products; more direct access to international markets, and the continuing need for improved farmer extension and training. The key role of AHPERAMBUTAN in helping smallholder farmers is evaluated.