

FRANCISCO DE JESÚS LÓPEZ

Francisco Oaxaqueño Organics Farms



Cerro Cabeza is the name of the little town in the state of Oaxaca, Mexico where Francisco de Jesús López was born and lived until he came to California. The town is located in a rocky, mountainous area, therefore Francisco remembers farming was difficult, especially when irrigating. He only could attend school until third grade and the classes were taught in his native language, *Trique*. When he decided to take the Farmer Education Program at ALBA, it took a lot of sacrifice and determination to finish; because even though he loves farming his writing and reading skills were very much challenged. With tutoring assistance from an ALBA intern, he graduated from the program in 2009 and in 2011, he is managing 2.5 acres.

"I really liked and enjoyed the classes because I learned how to improve my farming techniques. I got to know many facts that I never applied before to get better results on my crops. There were many concepts that I didn't know about, drip irrigation for example, also I never have used a tractor and many others pieces of equipment that I know how to use now." Together with his father and brothers, he cultivated corn, coffee, green beans, bananas, tomatoes, oranges and peppers for family consumption and to sell at the farmers markets in the nearby city of Puxtla.

Francisco came to California with his wife and daughter. They both worked for several years as field workers, mostly picking green beans. Today they have 3 girls and a boy, and they are working hard to cultivate a good future for them. Francisco left his seasonal job and he is now fully dedicated to his farm at ALBA. His wife helps him on the farm after she finish her part-time job. "My situation is changed for the better now, I have a job the entire year and I don't have to rely on seasonal jobs. I'm even able to bring my son and teach him how to work the land, he is really good at learning, he knows a lot about farming already, and I can see he loves it. I also feel good because I'm helping in providing jobs to my brother and his three sons".

The first year was difficult since he was trying to grow new products in an environment very different from Cerro Cabeza. However, he managed the best he could and saved some money to get his first pieces of equipment. For this season, *Oaxaqueño Organics Farm* is producing carrots, beans, peppers, cilantro, green beans, radishes, and squash.

Since he is selling his produce to *ALBA Organics*, his vegetables go to the corporate and university campus dining halls that are part of its network.

Francisco de Jesús hopes to be able to rent and manage more land. He is taking the early years as a learning process preparing for when the opportunity arrives. "For now I want to improve on the crops I have, but not strawberries because I think that is a hard to farm, I think it takes a lot of work and risk, for now I'd rather keep producing what I know better."

