

# CRS F2F Benin

## Bees and cashews provide a winning formula for farmers in Benin

PROJECT LOCATION	Benin
TIMEFRAME	2019-2023
COUNTRY PROJECT	Modernizing Agriculture
HOST	Cashew

Cashew farmers in Benin, trained by a Catholic Relief Services (CRS) Farmer-to-Farmer (F2F) volunteer, are filled with fresh hope after discovering a new way to double farm revenues.

The cashew production season in Benin is brief, lasting just four months a year from January to April. This has led many cashew farmers to look for new ways to generate income from their orchards. One way to do this is by increasing the productivity of their trees. Cashew yield in Benin is just 1.5-4 kilograms per tree, compared to neighbors, Ghana and Nigeria, that harvest 5.8 and 6.9 kilograms per tree, respectively. Farmers wondered if they could enhance cashew productivity while introducing a new income generating practice.

### PROGRAM STATISTICS

**302**

Number of assignments conducted

**17,282**

Number of people directly trained

**145**

Number of hosts supported

In Benin’s cashew producing regions farmers are organized into cooperatives and unions, which are responsible for helping members face multiple challenges. One such organization is the Oueme-Plateau (URPA/OP) Cooperative Union that has introduced beekeeping as an excellent means of increasing revenues and living standards while addressing one of the impacts of climate change on cashew production. Demand for honey is high in Benin and globally, making beekeeping an attractive prospect for the union and its members. However, URPA-OP faced one crucial challenge: none of its members had the technical skills needed to make beekeeping work.

This is where F2F stepped in. With prior experience as an F2F host, URPA-OP knew that CRS could access expertise on a wide range of farming issues. With this in mind, the union approached CRS Benin for support with their beekeeping ambitions. The wheels of recruitment were set in motion and shortly afterward, American expert Robert Owen signed up to help the union install its first beehives. Bringing to bear years of experience in the beekeeping sector, Mr. Owen conducted a series of hands-on trainings with URPA-OP’s farmers on topics ranging from hive management to honey harvesting, while making use of and even adapting the equipment at the union’s disposal.



Volunteer Robert Owen with the farmers he trained in a cashew orchard. Photo by CRS F2F staff.

One farmer who attended the trainings was URPA/OP President, Mr. Dekounde Hodonou. He was quick to express his appreciation for Mr. Owen’s insights, telling CRS, “With this training I learned that we could install beehives in cashew orchards and not just in forests, and at the same time increase the production of cashew trees and other flowering crops settled in the surrounding area. I also discovered concrete hives, which cost less and last longer than wooden hives.”

As well as gaining new knowledge, in 2021 Mr. Hodonou increased his annual income by \$340 (18%) thanks to the introduction of beehives, a successful harvest of cashew nuts, and Mr. Owen’s trainings. “With just five beehives on my five-hectare plot of cashew trees,” he said, “in one year I collected about 15 liters of honey per hive and sold 75 liters at a unit price of \$4.50.”

“That assignment was a real success,” agreed URPA/OP Director, Mr. Dah Dovonon. “Nowadays when we visit farmers’ cashew [farms], we hear the hum of bees and see all the new beehives, which was not the case two years ago.” This is because other farmers have seen the benefits enjoyed by the 33 farmers Mr. Owen trained and have started to emulate them.

Since the assignment, interest in beekeeping has surged among the union’s members. Dozens of farmers install beehives on their farms every season. Farmers have come to see beekeeping not just as a viable means of raising their incomes, but one which combines well with cashew production. Through hive management, farmers ensure the pollination of their cashew trees, which increases yields. Installing beehives has also reduced theft of cashew nuts from farms because many people are afraid of bees.

“Initially, we thought we just needed to find a way to increase the yields of the cashew [farms]. But when we started with the beehives, we quickly saw that this was a great investment and one that repaid itself,” Mr. Hodonou noted.



Mr. Dekounde Hodonou in his orchard next to a beehive installed on a cashew tree. Photo by CRS F2F Staff.

With such success, URPA-OP continues to encourage its new and existing members to scale up beekeeping activities on their farms. The union believes beekeeping will prove to be a sustainable way for cashew farmers to strengthen their livelihoods. Keen to continue learning and improving their practices—especially in disease management—Benin’s newest beekeepers are using their new knowledge to start a lucrative business in cashew farming and to harvest a promising future.



Installation of a concrete beehive in a cashew orchard by URPA-OP technicians in 2021. Photo courtesy of URPA-OP.