



Barrick
helps farmers see green
in fields of red

SUN-DRIED TOMATOES NOW BIG BUSINESS FOR ARGENTINA FARMING COMMUNITIES



Jose Seeman shakes his acres of dried-out onion

Jachal, in the foothills of Argentina's Andes Mountains. "This is a community of about 20,000 residents and we've always mainly relied on onion production," says Seeman, an experienced local farmer. "But that's a practice whose time has run out. It has no future."

head as he walks through fields in his hometown of

Long considered the onion capital of Argentina, Jachal's history of single-crop farming led to soil degradation and over-saturation of the commercial market. Low crop yields meant that farmers in this tight-knit community, located near Barrick's Veladero mine and the company's Pascua-Lama project, lacked a sustainable income. A low standard of living also meant no capital to invest back into their business.

"With onions, you get farther and farther behind," said Nelson Jofre, another local farmer. "Ten years go by and maybe just one year is a good one, so it's not profitable anymore. It's bad. Really bad."

Barrick helped to launch a sun-dried tomato exporting initiative to help Jachal farmers in Argentina develop a sustainable livelihood and expand their production and markets. In 2005, an agreement was signed between Barrick and the Jachal Farmers Association to assist local farmers to diversify their crops, improve productivity and sell their produce on the international market at competitive prices. The government of San Juan province was also a signatory to the agreement, which was warmly welcomed by the struggling farming community.

Barrick also upgraded existing irrigation systems, which improved soil conditions and crop yields for farmers in both Jachal and the neighbouring Iglesia community.



In the year following the agreement, a group of 10 local farmers agreed to participate in a small pilot project to see how tomatoes would take to the climate. Barrick offered training, technical support and advice to these farmers and organized instructional visits to successful large-scale farms in other parts of San Juan province. A total of 10 hectares were sown that year. The harvest was processed at a drying facility owned by Prune SA in San Juan, where the fresh tomatoes were turned into the popular sun-dried product.

The results from the first year were impressive, yielding a healthy tomato crop and providing the farmers with a sustainable income for the first time in decades. In the subsequent growing season, the cultivation area was doubled to 20 hectares and results were equally promising.

“We found that the international market for sun-dried tomatoes was growing and the product produced in San Juan province was of excellent quality,” said Julio Claudeville, Corporate Affairs manager for Barrick Argentina. “That made the producers enthusiastic about the crop and gave them confidence in continuing on a larger scale.”

In 2009, Barrick worked with local partners to construct a tomato drying facility in Jachal to serve the home-grown industry. That year, more farmers expressed an interest in starting tomato operations. In all, 23 producers took part with 50 hectares of land sown in Jachal and Iglesia. The industry is primed to grow with each coming year.

“Tomato production has generated a lot of interest,” said Alberto Ray, a local farmer hired to manage the new drying plant in Jachal. “A lot of people have become involved and it’s turned into a good business.”

What began with a batch of modest tomatoes baking in the blazing sun has turned into big business in San Juan province and prosperity for local farming families. Today, both Jachal and Iglesia are becoming world-renowned for their production of sun-dried tomatoes and local farmers are reaping the economic benefits.

“I started two years ago and this season I’m going to double the amount I planted last year, just because the results are so good,” said Marcelo Balmaceda, a local tomato producer. Nearby, Marcelo Tejada is also seeing excellent results with his tomato crops. “Barrick has been helping us,” Tejada said. “They’ve always helped us with the supplies we need. They’ve been providing us with lots of things that have been making all this possible.”

Since the start of the initiative in 2007, Barrick has invested nearly \$600,000 to help local farmers get their operations off the ground. The company has been involved in every step of the project’s development, hiring professional agronomists to provide training and quality control to producers keen to be part of the burgeoning industry. As part of the company’s contribution, quality seedlings appropriate for the climate have also been provided to ensure a high rate of success.

The success of the sun-dried tomatoes produced by farmers in San Juan province is having an international impact. In Brazil, where sun-dried tomatoes are becoming a mainstay of the diet, importers are reportedly thrilled with the high-quality product.

“The Argentine sun-dried tomato, and especially this brand *El Plata* from San Juan, is one of the finest you’ll find in the market,” said Hermes Verniano, a representative of the Fornello company in Brazil. “It has a nice texture, good consistency and a flavour that makes it stand out from the dried tomatoes of other countries.”

Since the product began appearing in Brazil, its sales have grown year after year, providing the farmers in San Juan with a tidy profit and an increased demand for their produce.

The eastern slopes of the Central Andes Mountains are now ablaze with tomato plants and a renewed economic optimism for the future of agriculture. “This is opening up a whole new future for us,” said farmer Jose Seeman. “Giving us a chance to diversify our farms.”

