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Farmer communities to produce organic sweet onion in Oruro with U.S. Government assistance

With the support of the Governments of Bolivia and the United States, as well as that of the Prefect's Office of Oruro, an agricultural project for the production of organic sweet onion in Cantu Santa Ana will be inaugurated on September 1.

One hundred and fifty families from 3 communities in the Department of Oruro will participate in this project for the 2006 – 2007 season, after completing a lengthy process to obtain organic certification for their land plots, production operations, and onion handling. The communities of Alantañita Caravi (Machacamarcá) and Pasto Grande (Caracollo) will meet in Cantu Santa Ana (Soracachi) to join the celebration of the beginning of operations of this agricultural project, which constitutes an important opportunity to improve the families' quality of life.

Bolivia achieved recognition for the quality of sweet yellow onions as being 100% organic in early 2006. This was the result of years of learning, introduction and certification of onion varieties, as well as efforts to implement strict agricultural standards and practices, all undertaken through projects financed by the U.S. Government, through its Agency for International Development (USAID). The project seeks to directly benefit small producers, so that they can increase their annual income and improve the quality of life of their families. This program started in 2001 within the framework of the SIBTA (Bolivian System of Agricultural Technology), a standing program of the Ministry of Rural, Farming and Environmental Development, the Foundation for Agricultural Technology Development of the Valleys (FDTA-Valles), and USAID/Bolivia's MAPA Project.

Oruro is the only place in the world with international certification for the production of organic sweet onion. This allows for better opportunities in the markets demanding high quality organic products. The price a farmer receives for a certified organic product, that undergoes very strict control procedures, is higher than the one obtained for a "traditional" product.

From this year on, the community-based business "Bolivia Produce" will assume the responsibility of providing technical assistance to the producers and the trading processes. "Bolivia Produce" is a business organization that gathers several sweet onion producer associations and FDTA-Valles organization.



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USAID is the U.S. Government Agency for International Development. Its cooperation programs in Bolivia are directed to improve the effectiveness, responsiveness, and transparency of Bolivian democracy; provide greater economic opportunities to poor populations through business and trade development; develop healthcare best practices and services; improve the sustainable use of natural resources; and promote social and economic development in order to reduce illicit production of coca.