

SANTA MARTA, COLOMBIA – Connections across Latin America with RELASER

16 Latin American countries were represented at the three-day agricultural extension conference in Santa Marta, Colombia from October 27-29. RELASER, Corpoica, IICA, and Minagricultura all hosted the event to bring together extension practitioners, producers of mangoes, coffee, and cacao, economists and agricultural engineers, as well as researchers, just some of the 124 individuals that participated in presentations, panels, and roundtable discussions exploring timely topics surrounding agricultural extension across the



RELASER network. With a focus on participatory practices and social capital development for constructing public policy for extension services, themes strongly emphasized areas concerning adaptation to climate change, importance of agrobiodiversity and farmer/producer cooperatives, and evidence from methodologies, tools, and processes of past extension efforts.

Benjamin Mueller and Katy Heinz represented MEAS during a panel discussion on the “Intercambios”, or country exchanges, which took place throughout Latin America this year. The Intercambios involved two country extension programs meeting together for two days to exchange best practices and lessons learned, techniques and expertise on different facets of their extension systems to learn from each other and improve each system. Vera Boerger of FAO/Panama began the first session on extension experiences in natural resources for agricultural innovation,



Carlos Rodrigo Solarte of the National Federation of Colombian Coffee Growers spoke on strengthening extension for coffee growers throughout generations, and Neidy Clavijo from Pontificia Javeriana University, Colombia spoke on participatory conservation of agrobiodiversity in the Colombian Andes.

Field trips to ASOFRUCOL, Corpoica, CENIPALMA, and FEDEGAN brought understanding to the challenges farmers are facing in Colombia at this time. These four organizations are connected within the same network: for example, Corpoica does research and innovation for adapting to climate change and preventative measures against risk for the farmers in the CENIPALMA and ASOFRUCOL cooperatives. We toured the mango and lime tree farms at ASOFRUCOL as well as the expansive agricultural research and development acres at Corpoica, which included hot pepper plants and palm trees for oil.



The final day brought many roundtable discussions on what participants learned over the past two days, exchanging ideas and innovations from their respective extension practices. Overall, the conference provided a space and uninterrupted time for learning, understanding, and strengthening old and making new connections. At the end, it was announced that Mexico will be hosting the next meeting in 2016!