

WASH IN AGRICULTURAL SUPPLY CHAINS

Lessons from our collaboration with Agricola Cerro Prieto (ACP)

As the partner for sustainable growth, we work closely with our suppliers to build resilient value chains that care for both people and nature. In our sector, water use is widely discussed. However, the human aspect of water, access to water, hygiene and sanitation (WASH), is rarely addressed as a strategic workplace topic, even though it directly impacts worker wellbeing, dignity and health. We see WASH as an opportunity to strengthen how we care for people in our value chain and to place worker wellbeing more centrally in the way we work with our partners. This case study shows how together with our partner ACP, we have identified ways to move from a compliance topic to an opportunity for improving worker wellbeing in a large agricultural setting.

From due diligence to collaboration with ACP

In 2022, we initiated a due diligence project in our avocado and blueberry supply chains. One of the clear desired outcomes was the need to better understand WASH conditions in agricultural workplaces and how companies address them in practice.

In 2024, ACP joined us in exploring this topic further. From the beginning, the focus was on collaboration: learning together and identifying practical ways to strengthen WASH in daily operations, rather than auditing or controlling. At the start, WASH had not been addressed as an operational priority. It was not yet clear how WASH could be translated into practical and useful actions, making the project a shared learning journey rather than a predefined solution.

WASH challenges in a large and diverse workforce in agriculture

In Peru, access to WASH services varies significantly by region. During peak harvest periods, large agro-exportation companies like ACP employ thousands of seasonal workers from across the country, including from areas with limited access to safe drinking water and sanitation. This diversity results in different habits, expectations and levels of trust in WASH services. For example, some workers are unfamiliar with treated water and may avoid drinking it due to taste. Sanitation facilities may be used differently depending on prior experience and this might lead to hygiene challenges in the facilities.

Additionally, farm conditions make good WASH hard to achieve. Workers are often exposed to heat, toilets can be located far from work areas, menstrual hygiene requires specific facilities, and high hygiene standards are critical when handling food products.

These issues are sensitive and closely linked to culture and personal behaviour. Addressing them requires more than infrastructure and rules. It requires trust, dialogue and approaches that are adapted to the realities of agricultural work.

Project KEY FACTS

Location: Peru

Crops: Avocado, asparagus and blueberry

Workforce during peak season: approximately 15,000 workers

Project duration: 27 months

WASH PROJECT AT AGRICOLA CERRO PRIETO



WASH Assessment

To better understand the situation, we worked with a local consulting company expert in WASH, Hidrika, to conduct an in depth assessment at ACP's facilities.

- The assessment was benchmarked against the WASH4Work framework and complemented with UNICEF monitoring indicators.
- The results showed that WASH services at ACP were already well organised and performing strongly, with scores between 80% and 100% across assessed categories.
- At the same time, the assessment revealed opportunities for improvement previously invisible.

These included small but important gaps and opportunities, such as repairing and constantly revising faulty locks on some toilet doors, as well as broader opportunities related to awareness, behaviour and worker engagement.

By highlighting both strengths and opportunities, the assessment helped us and ACP understand how WASH could be addressed in practice. Building on these insights, ACP's leadership quickly developed and began implementing an action plan.



Acting on WASH with ambassadors & practical improvements

Given the size of the workforce, a WASH ambassador approach was developed: selected workers received targeted training from the WASH experts and were empowered to act as peer representatives on WASH.

Their role is to:

- Share good WASH practices with colleagues
- Discuss sensitive topics through peer to peer dialogue
- Relay feedback to management through existing labour and health and safety committees

In parallel, ACP implemented practical improvements identified during the assessment, including small infrastructure fixes and clearer communication around WASH services.

This combination of practical actions and worker engagement helped make WASH more visible and tangible across the organisation.

Early IMPLEMENTATION FACTS

Number of WASH ambassadors:
30, including 13 women

**Workers reached
in the 1st year:** 280

**Quick wins already
implemented:**
7 identified & already addressed

Monitoring impact and progressive ownership by ACP

From the beginning, the project included monitoring indicators to assess effectiveness. One key indicator measured WASH satisfaction among ambassadors.

The first results showed that next to the strong technical performance there was room for strengthening the understanding and trust in WASH facilities, including confidence in the water quality. These insights helped reframe WASH as an awareness and trust topic rather than an infrastructure issue alone.

Immediately after the ambassadors' training, satisfaction levels increased significantly (+36%), reaching high levels of satisfaction. This confirmed that WASH specific awareness and dialogue were essential to improving the perception and use of WASH services.

These results marked a shift in perspective. A move from the initial exploratory phase to strong ownership of the topic. WASH is now considered a serious wellbeing and management opportunity, with actions embedded into company processes.

Lessons learned

This project already generated several key lessons that are relevant for other companies in agricultural supply chains:

- WASH deserves more attention in agriculture due to specific operational and human challenges
- Strong infrastructure is most effective when it is combined with awareness and knowledge of good WASH practices
- Worker perception and satisfaction are powerful indicators that can reveal hidden opportunities
- Peer based approaches are effective for addressing sensitive and behavioural topics
- Small, targeted actions can quickly improve dignity, wellbeing and workplace satisfaction

These lessons show that acting on WASH is both feasible and impactful, even in large and complex agricultural operations.



WHY GUIDANCE AND STANDARDS ON WASH MATTER

A broader learning for us from this collaboration relates to the role of standards and certifications. Agricultural suppliers often rely on social and water certifications to guide how workplaces are organised and where resources are allocated.

However, this project and an analysis of WASH inclusion in social standards confirmed that WASH is still weakly represented in most social standards. As a result, even committed companies may struggle to prioritise WASH or may lack guidance on how to address it in practice.

We believe that stronger guidance and better integration of WASH into social standards are essential to support companies in moving from compliance to meaningful action, particularly in agricultural contexts. We are taking action together with WaterAid (international WASH NGO) to develop this guidance.

More info?
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