

## Meet Maria Presentación... Chimborazo Province, Ecuador - Central Andes



Maria is the president of a farming cooperative of nearly 90 indigenous women from *Galtes*, **a rural farming community located at 11,500 ft. The region has experienced drought for ten months.** There are no underground water sources to tap for irrigation and most of the *páramo* (a sponge-like terrain that retains water) was destroyed by poor farming practices. **Without water, families can barely produce enough crops for food or income.** Maria says most families have emergency supplies of grains such as corn, quinoa, and beans – and if they are lucky enough to have chickens, they can eat eggs.

While families can get by with rationed food, **their income and health decline until it rains.**

Over **2,000 varieties of potatoes originally existed** in the Andes, precisely for adapting to quickly changing weather patterns. **Over 80% of these varieties have been lost** to industrial agriculture. **Maria's group is working with Peaks Over Poverty's local partners to rescue traditional farming practices and native seeds.** On a communal plot, the women have planted several types of Andean potatoes to see which grow best in drought conditions and to decrease their dependency on just one. They will split the seeds from the surviving varieties to plant on their own land. **The women's dream is to create a native seed bank for their entire community to prevent food shortages in the future.**

