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SUCCESS STORY

Sesame Campaign benefits thousands of farmers

More than half a million Ethiopian smallholder farmers depend on sesame, which is the country's second largest export next to coffee. Pest problems and heavy rains in the 2007/2008 season dropped export volumes from 208,917 MTs to 124,291 MTs. Countries such as India and China also had declines, however, sending market prices up. So, despite the drop in volume, Ethiopia's total sesame export value increased from \$171 million in 2006/2007 to \$185 million in 2007/2008.

The USAID-funded Agribusiness and Trade Expansion Program (USAID-ATEP) helps Ethiopia's sesame farmers solve production problems and increase quality and production through field-based technical assistance and training. To increase sesame yields and quality, the program worked with the Bureaus of Agriculture and Rural Development (BoARDs) in Amhara and Tigray, which account for more than 75 percent of the country's sesame production, to organize the "Millennium Sesame Campaign" in May and June 2008. The training campaign involved more than 8,000 farmers and extension agents and was carried out at demonstration plots in six woredas (28 kebeles) where USAID-ATEP provides technical and marketing support for cooperatives and commercial farmers. Training topics included land preparation, seed selection, weeding, Integrated Pest Management (IPM), and proper harvesting, storage and quality control.

A survey of farmers participating in the Millennium Sesame Campaign in January 2009 indicated that their average yields have increased to 6.8 quintals/hectare in 2007-08, up from 2.67 quintals/hectare during the difficult 2006-07 season and from 5.7 quintals/hectare on average for the three years prior. Farmers attribute this improvement to favorable rains and producing conditions during the recent season, as well as the use of improved practices learned.

Another assessment carried out by the Zonal Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, responsible for the five Woredas where the campaign was conducted, also confirmed that crop losses have significantly decreased while buyers have noted that the quality of the recent crop was also improved. As a result of the positive impact, BoARD representatives in Amhara and Tigray are requesting that a new campaign be carried out in 2009 that will include new farmers in their regions.



Photos by Fintrac Inc.

Dozens of farmers listen during a Millennium Sesame Campaign training event in Amhara in June 2008.



A sesame farmer trainee shows off his produce in Serequa Kebele, Amhara.

"Because of the better rainfall and trainings, I was able to produce almost three times more than last year on the same area of land".

– Ato Setegn Fekadu, Sesame Farmer,
Tach Armachiho, Amhara Region