

# Programme to Multiply Initial "Basic Seed" 438-Fold Yearly

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Some 82 metric tonnes of haricot bean "Basic Seed" harvested in December 2007 in a joint programme by Melkassa Agricultural Research Center (MARC) and USAID's Agribusiness and Trade Expansion Programme (ATEP); will be planted in July this year to harvest a further 2,000 metric tonnes increase in December 2008. In a bid to fill the haricot bean "Basic Seed" shortfall in Ethiopia, the joint programme will then, after MARC certifies it, distribute the seed to 15,000 farmers who will develop 20,000ha of land during the 2009 rainy season to cultivate the haricot bean.

The programme partners thus expect the crop harvest to be 36,000 metric tonnes almost after a year, and it will be sold at 450 dollars a tonne, generating a total of 16.2 million dollars in rural farm incomes.

The partners signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in November 2007 with objectives that include developing improved access and availability of seeds to farmers through the mechanism of trials, official variety registry, and subsequent retail sales.

ATEP also provided MARC – the main implementing organization of the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR) – 14,500 dollars in Technology Fund Grant to establish an official high-purity "Basic Seed" crop of Haricot beans, according to a publication by USAID.

The 82 metric tonnes of "Basic Seed" was sold to the Ethiopian seed Enterprise, farmers' cooperatives unions, selected NGOs and leading exporters for 400 Br a quintal, and it is from these bodies the farmers get the seed for the current rainy season.

"Currently, seed found in the hands of the

farmer is over used and the yield is minimal. It takes between three to five years to register specialized seeds that come from foreign markets," Eskinder Kebede, USAID-ATEP Coordinator told *Fortune*.

This is a too long and difficult process for small-scale farmers who do not have the means to import what they need by themselves, according to him.

FAO/WFP crop and food security assessment in January 2008 shows that in 2007 *meber* season, 97.7 pc of all seeds used were local seeds carried over from the previous harvest by the farmers themselves, following the traditional, on-farm selection process. Farmers identify the next year's seed stock while it is still maturing in the field, and give it special protection. They might also buy from preferred seed stocks kept by other farmers in the same locality.

"It is an undeniable fact that there is a gap of 30,000 metric tonnes in basic seed production. Concerning imported seed registration, there is no discrepancy between the mechanized farmers and small scale farmers," Acting Director of Crop Protection Department with EIAR, Bedada Girma (PhD) told *Fortune*.

If the seed is verified by experts the process of registration does not exceed a year, but when the seed is new, the process can take up to three to five years, the coordinator explained

EIAR was established in 1966 to secure self-sufficiency through increased productivity and production of cereals, pulses, oil crops, vegetables and fruits. It is also expected to promote export commodities by improving the quality and quantity of coffee, tea, sugar, cotton and other industrial crops along with those already mentioned.