

## SUCCESS STORY

# Hybrid seeds and drip irrigation boost horticulture yields

Ethiopia's horticulture and floriculture exports have increased steadily in recent years, reaching \$95 million in 2007. Although fresh-cut roses dominate these exports, growers are diversifying their product ranges with assistance from USAID's Agribusiness and Trade Expansion Program (ATEP). Fresh vegetables and summer flowers are two emerging crop categories helping Ethiopian growers and exporters supply more products at better prices.

Kibbutz Ethiopia is a 40-hectare farm in Awash Valley that supplies vegetables to local markets. Interested in developing an export program, owner Yilak Negash joined USAID-ATEP as a lead client in August 2006. He conducted a trial on 1 hectare with new hybrid varieties of onions, cabbage and hot peppers to test how they would perform under Ethiopian growing conditions. The trial was carried out in partnership with USAID-ATEP, with both parties cost-sharing the investment in hybrid seeds and drip irrigation and Kibbutz Ethiopia receiving weekly technical assistance from the project's agronomists.

The results were impressive, with yields averaging four times the farm's previous levels, jumping from 1 kilogram per plant to 5 kilograms per plant for tomatoes; 40 grams per head to 120 grams per head for onions; 1 kilogram per head to 4 kilograms per head for cabbage; and 1 kilogram per plant to 2 kilograms per plant for hot peppers.

The project is backing results like this with new linkages to international seed providers for distribution of hybrid seeds. Most importantly, a larger trial with Melkassa Research Center in Oromia is underway to register new hybrid varieties with government authorities, paving the way for commercial distribution in Ethiopia. A major horticulture field day for farmers in the Melkassa area will take place in June 2008 to showcase the new varieties and inform farmers how to access these high-yield seeds.

For his part, Negash invested almost \$30,000 on infrastructure and equipment for his farm since the crop trial, including 4 hectares of drip irrigation. The hybrid varieties have better quality and shelf life than local varieties and earned him premiums ranging from ETB 0.20 per kilogram to ETB 1.00 per kilogram. "My buyers are still asking me for the hybrids," Negash says.

USAID-ATEP is an aggressive, market-led effort that is energizing four industry sectors — coffee; hides, skins and leather; oilseeds; and horticulture. The program is improving the productivity, competitiveness and sales of thousands of Ethiopian farmers, processors and traders.



A worker at Kibbutz Ethiopia in Awash helps prepare the farm for drip irrigation.



Kibbutz Ethiopia recently conducted a trial with USAID-ATEP-recommended seeds that resulted in heads 300 percent heavier than traditional varieties.

Photos by Fintrac Inc.

**"My buyers are still asking me for the hybrids."**

— Yilak Negash, Owner of Kibbutz Ethiopia