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US Government Strengthens Ghanaian Seed Sector

From Left: Dr. Ahmed Yakubu, Deputy Minister of Food and Agriculture in Charge of Crops in a hand shake with Mr. Robert Jackson, U.S. Ambassador to Ghana, Mr. Cletus Achaab, ATT's Senior Seed Advisor (behind), and Mr. Andy Karas, Mission Director of USAID/Ghana (far right). To the right (insert) is a photo of the seed inspection lab in Tamale.

US Ambassador to Ghana, Mr. Robert Jackson has handed over three newly constructed seed inspection laboratories to the Ministry of Food and Agriculture's (MOFA) Seed Inspection Unit as part of the US government's support towards transformation of the agriculture sector in Ghana's three northern regions.

The USAID-constructed Seed Inspection Labs are located next to MOFA's regional offices in Wa, Bolgatanga and Tamale the capital towns of the three northern regions. The labs are an integral part of the improved certified seed value chain that will provide smallholder farmers in Northern Ghana with quality seed at affordable costs.

The newly installed U.S. Ambassador and the Deputy Minister of Food and Agriculture in Charge of Crops, Dr. Ahmed Yakubu, jointly cut a ribbon and unveiled a plaque to signify the official inauguration of the Seed Inspection Lab in Tamale. The Ghana Seed Inspection Unit, managing agency for the labs, is a unit of the Plant Protection and Regulatory Services Directorate of MOFA. Its purpose is to increase the quantity and quality of high-yielding seeds available to Ghanaian farmers.

Ambassador Jackson, on his first-ever visit outside of Accra, delivered a keynote address, explaining that the labs will help make certified seeds more available so that even farmers in the most remote areas are able to use seeds that bring significantly increased yields.

He stressed the need for constant collaboration between all actors along the seed value chain to insure that the Ghanaian seed sector thrives, and stressed the importance of supporting northern Ghana's newly emerging private seed industry. The new seed laboratory was constructed through Feed the Future Ghana - Agriculture Technology Transfer Project, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development

Dr. Yakubu who thanked the US government for responding to their request to underwrite the construction and equipping of the three new regional labs, stressed the importance of seed as the basis for agriculture.

"Food production heavily depends on quality seed", the Deputy Minister said.

Feed the Future Ghana Agriculture Technology Transfer Project Quarterly Newsletter

January-March, 2016

Ambassador Jackson, his wife Mrs. Jackson and Mr. Andy Karas, USAID Mission Director, visit Project farmers at Golinga

Mr. Andy Karas, USAID/Ghana Mission Director, US Ambassador Robert Jackson, and his wife Mrs. Jackson, inspecting dry season okra at a farm at the Golinga Irrigation scheme

Again, Mr. Andy Karas, Mrs. Jackson and US Ambassador Robert Jackson inspect a UDP banquettes production station at Golinga

Women Poised to Help Reclaim Barren Lands in Northern Regions

Low soil fertility is one of the major problems farmers in the north regions face, and as a result over 50 percent of farmers' production costs go into purchasing chemical fertilizer. The fertilizer is often misused as many farmers do not know which nutrient in the soil is deficient, and consequently, not sure of the right combination of various fertilizers to use.

To strengthen the soil, reduce chemical fertilizer use and associated costs, while strengthening basic soil structure, the Feed the Future Ghana Agriculture Technology Transfer Project supported three women from Upper East, Northern and Upper West regions to attend a training program on organic composting organized by the International Fertilizer Development Center (IFDC).

Mrs. Baagiro Abena, a farmer and a beneficiary of the organic composting training has started preparing compost and sharing the skills she learned with women's groups in Suke, Tum, Sena, Konu and Dindo, along with school children and men with the support of PRUDA, one of ATT's local implementing partners.

Already, she along with the two other female trainees, are making great impacts by reaching over 1,000 farmers in the Northern, Upper East and Upper West regions of Ghana. Abena is convinced that the use of organic inputs such as compost and farm yard manure play a vital role in improving soil health, which translates to increased crop yields.

"I am ready to give further guidance to other individuals and groups on composting schemes so that together we can reclaim barren lands," she said.

Mrs. Abena overseeing the harvesting of compost

Feed the Future Ghana Agriculture Technology Transfer Project Quarterly Newsletter

January-March, 2016

Simple Prince Agro-Dealer Cashes In on the Sale of Urea Briquettes

Mr. Prince Yao Koreh serves customers who are buying urea briquettes at his shop. ***Insert****: The polo shirt depicts how urea briquettes are to be placed between rice plants. The Polo shirt was printed by Mr. Koreh.*

After the introduction in 2014 of Urea Deep Placement (UDP) to farmers in the Upper East Region of Ghana, 59 year old Mr. Prince Yao Koreh, owner of Simple Prince agro-dealer shop is cashing in on the sale of urea briquettes, a central component of UDP technology.

The Feed the Future Ghana – Agriculture Technology Transfer Project (ATT) equipped him with training and a briquetting machine in the form of a small equipment grant to produce urea briquettes, which are then sold to rice farmers in order to dramatically increase yields.

The endeavor was not profitable in that very first year. Koreh produced 62 bags of urea briquettes and sold 48 bags. Each 50-killogram bag was sold for GHC120 (US$31.60).

He explained that in 2015, due to insufficient water at the irrigation sites for dry season rice farming, the demand and purchase of the technology were low. Therefore, the remaining 14 bags from the previous year were carried forward to 2016.

"However, the situation this dry season has changed. I sold all the remaining 14 bags and produced an additional 106 bags. So far, I have only 18 bags in stock," he explained.

To facilitate the upscaling of the technology and the use of the urea briquettes, he has created new sales points at various irrigation facilities and has started a massive radio and on-farm campaign to advertise the fertilizer.

2014				2015				2016			
Total produced	Number sold	Price per 50-kg(U.S.$)	Total sold(U.S. $)	Total produced	Number sold	Price per 50kg(U.S. $)	Total sold	Total produced	Number sold	Price per 50kg(U.S. $)	Total sold(U.S. $)
62 bags	48 bags	31.6	1,516	0	0	0	0	105 bags	98 bags	34.7	3400

"As part of our marketing strategy we have fabricated a carrier for transporting the urea briquetting machine to the farmers' required locations for bulk briquetting.

We are also providing transport service to convey briquettes from the urea briquettes production site to farmers' rice fields, as well as offering a UDP briquettes application process printed on polo-shirts for farmers," he said.

Koreh called on scientists to fast-track research of the technology's feasibility in maize and other crop production that are dominate in the northern regions of Ghana. This will help widen the demand coverage and give him more customers.

"Once farmers know more about UDP and its advantages to their rice crops and adopt the new technology, my market will be secured." Koreh said.

Mr. Koreh arranges briquettes in a sealed sack.

USAID FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Feed The Future Ghana Agriculture Technology Transfer Project* IFDC GHANA *P.O. Box ER 542, Tamale* Gumani CRS Premises* Telephone: +233 (0) 3720-28220/1* E-mail: ATT@ifdc.org* Web: www.ifdc.org

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Feed the Future Ghana Agriculture Technology Transfer Project Quarterly Newsletter

January-March, 2016

Justin Finnegan interacts with Golinga farmers

Mr. Justin Finnegan of USAID exchanges pleasantries with Mr. Saibu Yamale

Farmers' groups working with the Feed the Future Ghana Agriculture Technology Transfer Project at Golinga in the Northern Region were pleased to host Mr. Justin Finnegan, Deputy Assistant to the Administrator in USAID's Bureau for Food Security, as well as other delegation members last quarter.

The USAID team interacted with farmers and observed the impact of UDP technology on rice production at the irrigation scheme. The delegation, which was led by Mr. Brian Conklin, Deputy Office Director, Office of Economic Growth, discussed how the introduction of UDP technology and improved rice seed has significantly increased their yields. The USAID delegation had the opportunity to observe rice transplanting and urea briquettes application, conducted by women's groups trained by ATT's staff.

Mr. Saibu Yamale, lead farmer at Golinga, welcomed the team and briefed them on day-to-day farming activities, good agriculture practices adopted through the project, and benefits they have derived from UDP technology.

He reported yields of 5.7 metric tons per hector (mt/ha) – a three-fold increase over the baseline yield for rice in the northern Savannah Accelerated Development Authority (SADA) regions.

UDP Tech introduced in U/W Region

Madam Grace Bong-ebie works on her rice field

Rice in the Upper West is traditionally produced under rain-fed systems despite the existence of a number of irrigation schemes. Aside from small vegetable farming, no other farming activities occurs during the dry season. But the introduction of rice farming under UDP technology by the Feed the future Ghana Transfer Project has been well received in Daffiama and Sankan. Although it was the first time farmers had been exposed to the new UDP fertilization technology, a total of 81 farmers from these two communities have already adopted the practice.

UDP technology is a package that involves good land preparation, the use of improved and certified seeds, and proper transplanting of rice seedlings (transplanting in line with 20cm x 20cm intervals between plants, ensuring single seedling transplanting and moist ground before seedlings are transplanted). Before the introduction of the technology, farmers had the opportunity to participate in ATT's on-farm video education, where they were taught and guided to use quality and certified seeds, correct nursing and transplanting schedules, ideal plant spacing, timely weed control, correct use of briquettes, and timely harvesting of crops.

Madam Grace Bong-ebie, a lead farmer, is applying the technology because she was convinced by the video and the training. "What I saw in the film cannot be a lie because currently I can confidently say my field is similar to the one I saw in the video and this is the first time my rice field has looked green and even. I am waiting patiently to see the yield." she said. Grace said the introduction of the technology has engaged many of the men in the community who would have been without employment during the dry season because they do not have any other work apart from farming which normally starts in May/June.

Hapep Fingers Get Soy-Cow Machine

Hajia Hajara Taimako, explains how the machine works to the dignitaries.

Hapep Fingers is a women-owned, indigenous beverage processing company in Tamale, engaged in the production of soy products. It is owned by Hajia Hajara Ibrahim Taimako, a female entrepreneur. USAID, under its Feed the Future-Ghana Agriculture Technology Transfer Project handed over a soy-cow processing machine and its host building to the company at a well-attended ceremony at its site in Tamale.

Mr. Alhassan Mohammed Sorogodoo, the Sangnerigu District Chief Executive (DCE) called on Ghanaians to consume locally produced foods, especially rice. He commended USAID for its numerous projects in and around Tamale, and said these were complementing the government's efforts at transforming the lives of the people. He pledged that the Metropolitan Assembly would continue to work closely with development partners to bring about the needed economic growth to the area.

Mr. Mike Dockrey, ATT's Chief of Party, said the U.S. government, through its partnerships with the Ghanaian government and its Feed the Future implementing partners, would provide support towards the realization of food security, and resulting increases in household incomes. He gave the assembled crowd the assurance that the ATT project would continue to embark on projects that had the potential to transform lives. Present at the event was the Mayor of Tamale Metro, Abdul Hana Gundadow.